

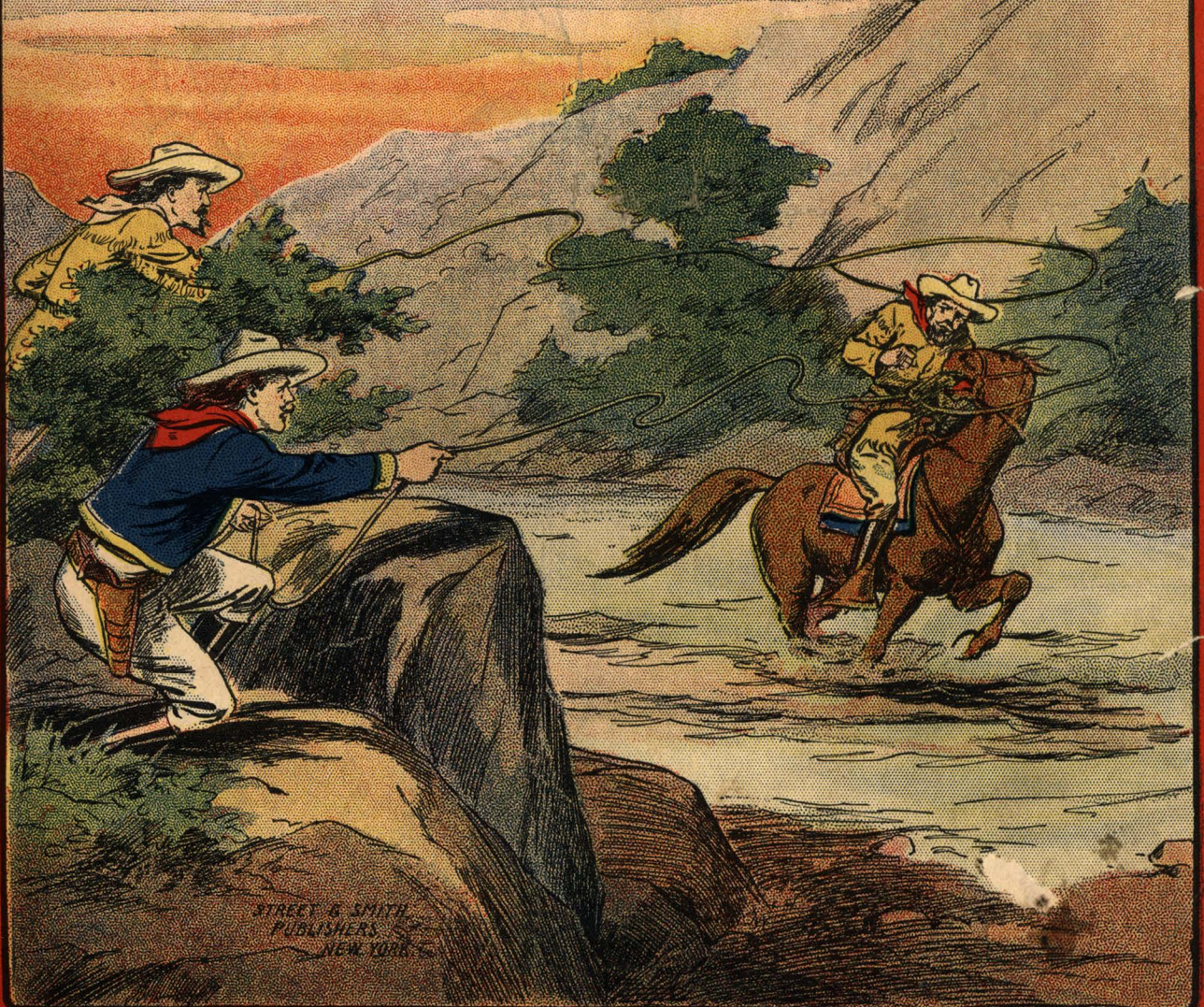
The BUFFALO BILL STORIES

Devoted To Far West Life



**BUFFALO BILL
AND THE VALLEY TERRORS**

**OR PAWNEE BILL'S
GREAT ROUND-UP**
BY THE AUTHOR OF
"BUFFALO BILL"



The two Bills threw their ropes at the same instant, one noose settling about the horse's neck, and the other over the startled rider's shoulders.

THE BUFFALO BILL



A WEEKLY PUBLICATION

STORIES

DEVOTED TO BORDER LIFE

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Buffalo Bill and the Valley Terrors.

Or, PAWNEE BILL'S GREAT ROUND-UP.

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

CHAPTER I.

THE UNWILLING PASSENGER.

"Well, this is sad news," said Buffalo Bill. "But I think we can rescue the girl."

"Yes, and at the same time capture that band of outlaws known as the Valley Terrors, and led by that mysterious man, Major Iron Hand," replied Pawnee Bill.

"All right, then, let us set out on the trail this very evening," returned Buffalo Bill.

The two famous scouts engaged in this conversation in the tavern known as Kate's Kitchen, at Hallelujah City, a very tough mining camp. The proprietor of the tavern was Lady Kate, a woman of mystery. The only other woman in the camp was one who kept a gambling saloon, called the Queen of Hearts. She was addressed by all as Lady Lou. The real names of these two women were Kate Fenwick and Louise Gray.

Previous to the decision reached by Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill to go on the trail to rescue one to whom they alluded as "the girl," word had reached them from Fort Benning, saying that Miss Helen Quimby, daughter of Major Quimby, had been kidnaped.

The news had been brought to Buffalo Bill by Jack Crawford, the scout, and was contained in a letter from Colonel Roylston, in command at the fort. Crawford immediately started back for the fort to join a company of soldiers that was to leave the fort in command of Captain Alf Taylor, to proceed to Shadow Valley and attack the Valley Terrors.

Roylston told how Miss Quimby had set out in an overland stage to make a trip East. On the way, a supposed Pony Express rider had halted the stage and handed Captain Willis, in command of the detachment of soldiers acting as guard for the stage, a forged letter from

Roylston, in which it was stated that outlaws were in pursuit of the stage, and that the cumbersome vehicle had better proceed on its journey with only Miss Quimby and her girl friend as passengers, while the soldiers should remain behind to waylay the outlaws.

The stage continued its journey without the escort. Presently it was again halted by a supposed sergeant from the fort, who informed Miss Quimby that her father had been hurt while out hunting, and desired her to return to the fort. The sergeant then produced a riding skirt and hat belonging to Helen, which he said he had brought from the fort. She donned them and rode away on a horse which the sergeant had brought for the purpose. The supposed sergeant and two supposed soldiers acted as her escort. That was the last seen of her.

Meantime, at the fort, a forged note had been found in Helen's room, in which it was stated that she had voluntarily left the fort. Her own name was signed to the note. The note was meant to create the supposition that Helen had eloped with a stranger who had appeared at the fort in her father's absence, and had paid marked attention to her.

But only a few of the officers at the fort were deceived by the note. Most of the officers, as did Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill, believed that Helen had been kidnaped by the notorious Valley Terrors.

As the two Bills had left Fort Benning on the special mission of finding the retreat of the Valley Terrors, the plan to rescue Helen fitted in well with their previous plans.

They had remained a few days at Hallelujah City, expecting there to gain some information of the Valley Terrors.

Meantime, two other scouts, Texas Jack and Surgeon

Frank Powell, had left Fort Lessing, not far distant from Fort Benning, on a similar errand, namely, to run down the outlaws. They entered Hallelujah City disguised, Powell as an Indian, Texas Jack as an old trapper. And so thorough was their disguise, that not even their old friends, Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill, knew them, though the four scouts met face to face in the Queen of Hearts gambling saloon.

A strange and dramatic scene had been enacted that night in that same Queen of Hearts Saloon.

A mysterious man in black, sometimes called the Unknown, but better known as Bandbox Bill, the Bravo in Broadcloth, had suddenly appeared in the gambling establishment and had driven out the desperadoes and taken a third prisoner.

The two characters whom he had driven out of the saloon and out of Hallelujah City at the point of his gun, were Slim Jones and Bully Joe. As soon as the two desperadoes were out of the town, the Bravo in Broadcloth had put two of his trusted scouts on their trail, these being Indians named Thundercloud and Lion Mouth. These two Indians received instructions to follow Slim Jones and Bully Joe and capture them and hold them until Bandbox Bill himself should appear. It was known that these two men had hanged a man who was supposed to be a member of a secret organization, and, for some reason, Bandbox Bill wished to avenge the man thus traitorously killed.

The man whom Bandbox Bill made prisoner by suddenly clapping handcuffs on him, was a bad man known as Sapling Sam. The Bravo in Broadcloth led this man out of the camp, and no one knew what the Bravo intended to do with his prisoner. It was supposed that the Bravo was taking Sapling Sam to the cabin near Hallelujah City, where the mysterious man made his home.

Meantime, Bandbox Bill had had a word aside with Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill. He told them he knew that they were on the trail of the Valley Terrors. And he advised them to proceed at once to Shadow Valley, where he would find the outlaws' retreat. He told them to enter the valley without their horses. He also told them that they would find Helen Quimby in the retreat of the outlaws.

A few minutes later Bandbox Bill took the disguised scouts, Texas Jack and Surgeon Powell, aside and told them he recognized them, and that it would be well for them to keep close upon the trail of Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill when those two famous scouts left camp, as the two Bills would surely need the assistance of the two disguised men, once they approached the retreat of the Valley Terrors.

That very day, all four scouts had seen a strange horsewoman known as the Woman in Black. She had warned all four of danger, while they were on their way to Hallelujah City. She rode a black horse, and a black habit, was very beautiful, and altogether a mystery to all in that region. It was known that she was connected with the Valley Terrors, yet she invariably warned intended victims of their danger. And that day, by taking a different trail, the four scouts had been saved from ambush, this being the result achieved through the timely warning given by the Woman in Black.

Therefore, to-night, when Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill were planning to start out on the trail, they spoke more than once of the Woman in Black, and wondered

whether they would at last discover her identity when they captured the Valley Terrors. For Bandbox Bill had told them to find the Woman in Black, and to be guided by her advice.

The two famous scouts also wondered at the seeming friendliness of the supposed Indian and old trapper, whose disguises even their keen eyes failed to penetrate. For in Lady Lou's gambling saloon that evening, when Bandbox Bill drove out Slim Jones and Bully Joe, and then took Sapling Sam prisoner, there had promised to be a general fight. And when Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill stepped to the side of Bandbox Bill to back him up, so did the supposed Indian and the seeming old trapper. The two Bills marked this move on the part of the two men who were unknown to them and noticed thereafter that the two constantly shadowed them. Little dreaming that they were being shadowed by two of their best friends, the two Bills tried in every way to throw the "shadows" off their track. All of which greatly amused Texas Jack and Surgeon Powell.

The next morning, Keen Kit, an Overland stage driver met with a peculiar experience.

Kit Keene, whose name was reversed to Keen Kit had had so many adventures on the road as a stage driver that he had come to look upon danger as a daily occurrence, and he was ever ready to face everything that came up before him in the discharge of his duties.

He had the end of the run some twenty miles out of Hallelujah City, picking up any passengers that came from that delectable place, and also that came in on another line down from Rock Outpost.

His coach often ran light, but again he would have a crowded trip of it.

But this particular morning he was going along the trail with an empty coach.

He knew the inner devilry of Hallelujah City well, and much of the people.

He rather liked the run there for it gave him a rest of several days, and he had never discovered which he admired most, Kate's Kitchen, or the pretty landlady herself.

He had heard much of the Bravo in Black, but never had seen him, as upon each of Keen Kit's visits that strange personage happened to be away.

With all his courage, Kit was a prudent man. So when this morning he had gotten five miles away from his starting point, he beheld a horseman in the trail ahead of him, he did not attempt to ride over him, though he had an idea that he was a road agent.

"Waal, I've got a empty hearse, and no money my own ter speak of, so it can't go very bad," he muttered. "That are ther trim o' ther Woman in Black, or it's a man," he added as he drew nearer to the horseman who sat motionless in the saddle.

As the coach drew near, the horseman drew no weapon but simply held up his right hand and Keen Kit drew rein, moving on slowly until he came close alongside the horseman.

"Waal, pard, yer is as gentle as a suckin' dove, I yer way o' haltin' me; but it allus makes me think as how when a man are real quiet he hev considerable ter back him."

"You take me for a road agent, then?"

"That same I does."

"I halted you to send a passenger through on your coach."

"Ah; whar be he?"

"I wish you to transfer him from coach to coach and make each man receipt for him."

"Yer talks as though he were a bag o' dust."

"He is equally as precious, and if he escapes, the man who has him in charge at the time will be held responsible."

"Who'll he be responsible to?"

"To me."

"Pard, excuse me, but I hasn't ther honor o' your acquaintance."

"In Hallelujah City they call me Bandbox Bill, the Bravo in Broadcloth."

"Pard, I is glad ter know yer, fer I hev heerd o' you many times."

"I am glad to make your acquaintance, Kit Keene, for I know you to be one of the pluckiest and squarest men that drive the Overland."

"Yer does know me?"

"Yes."

"Waal, I doesn't remember seein' yer before, much as I hes heerd tell on yer."

"I have seen you often, however; but you are going with an empty stage, I see."

"Yas; folks is skeert ter ride nowadays, onless they has ter."

And Kit gazed with real admiration at the strange man, of whom he had heard so much, and he did not forget that he had also heard that he was the secret chief of the Valley Terrors.

"Well, I wish you to take my man through. Here is the money to pay his way through and buy him food to Omaha, and there you will deliver him—or the driver on that end of the run will—to the man whose name is in this letter; and the letter is to go, too."

And the Bravo handed a letter up to Kit, who said:

"I understands, Mister Bandbox Bill. But whar are yer gent? Or maybe it be a grizzly yer is sendin' through a pet to a parson ter frighten leetle Sunday-school kids with, by illustratin' thet Bible story o' ther baldhead than an' ther she b'ars."

The stern face of the Bravo brightened up with a smile at Kit's suggestion, but he answered:

"No, he is no bear; but if you are attacked by road agents or a rescue is attempted, I give you authority to kill the prisoner."

"Whew!"

Then the Bravo gave a peculiar whistle, and out of the timber, where he had been concealed by some bowlders, came a horse, a perfect match of the one he rode.

There was a rider on his back, too, as well as a pack-saddle.

The rider's appearance surprised Kit, for he had seen him in Hallelujah City.

"This is my man, Kit Keene, and he is, as you see, in irons, and I will make him fast to the box rail with his chain and give you the keys."

The man was Sapling Sam, pale, haggard, and nervous.

The Bravo aided his prisoner to mount the box, locked the chain about the rail, so as to prevent an escape, and handed the keys over, with a roll of money, to Kit, who rode off upon his way once more, while Bandbox Bill, followed by his other horse, rode back into the timber the coach disappeared from sight.

CHAPTER II.

PLAYING TO WIN.

Kit Keene was interested in his prisoner, as well as in the one who had placed him in his keeping.

He had heard of Sapling Sam as a very hard citizen, in Hallelujah City, and his badly scarred face did not improve his appearance.

Why had the Bravo turned him over to him to carry through?

What right had Bandbox Bill to put a man in irons and ship him through, like freight, on an Overland coach?

As he could not answer these questions, Kit did not worry about guessing, so turned to his prisoner.

"Well, pard, you is in hard luck, I take it?"

"I are in very bad luck; but it will be all right when I has my say."

"What are ther matter atween you an' ther Bravo?"

"Waal, he says I is guilty o' crimes which I is innocent of, and he jist clapped me in irons and sends me through to Omaha."

"What right had he to put you in irons?"

"He held a gun to my head."

"Waal, thet were a durned good argiment, my friend; but hev he the power ter arrest yer?"

"Pard, thet man are playin' two games. He are pretendin' ter be huntin' outlaws, and he are, in reality, the king bee of 'em all. He accuses me o' bein' a outlaw, and sends me through ter prison, and yet I'll tarn informer and give ther whole truth, fer I doesn't intend ter hang."

"No, it ain't a pleasant way o' passin' in yer chips; but will they believe you?"

"I has ther proof."

"Then you is loaded fer b'ar?"

"I is."

"Does yer know who this Bandbox Bill be?"

"He are a outlaw."

"I see."

"Hes yer ever heerd o' Major Iron Hand?"

"Waal, now, I hev, oftener than I hes a longin' ter."

"Waal, he are thet man."

"No! If I'd 'a' knowed it, I'd hev jist played a leetle game o' hands up with him."

"Waal, next time yer meets him, jist kill him, fer he are thet man."

"Thar is a big price on his head, pard."

"Yes, and he are wu'th every dollar of it."

"I dare say."

"Now, pard, I hev give yer a pointer, so let me give yer another."

"Yas."

"I are a detective."

"No!"

"I are, and thar is whar I hev Bandbox Bill dead to rights."

"Yer will hev, yer means, fer jist now he hev ther grip on you."

"Yas, but you must let me go."

"I can't do it, pard."

"I are a Rocky Mountain detective, I tells yer."

"Waal, maybe you is when yer is a-runnin' 'round loose, but jist now yer is overland freight, paid through."

"Don't yer intend ter let me go?"

"I doesn't."

"I'll tell yer what I'll do."

"Yas?"

"I hes got a pile o' money with me."

"Waal?"

"Just run yer hand up under ther back o' my coat on either shoulderblade."

"It are done."

"Thar is a pocket on the inside o' my coat on either side."

"I feels 'em."

"Draw ther paper dust out o' one."

Kit obeyed, and found a package of new bank bills of the denomination of tens and twenties.

"Thar is two thousand in thet pile, Pard Driver."

"Yer don't say!"

"Yas, and t'other package hes got three thousand more."

"Yer is well heeled with greenbacks, pard."

"You bet; but I'll jist tarn over to you one thousand dollars ef yer'll onlock my irons and let me tell you good-by."

"No, pard."

"Call it ther small package."

"No."

"Call it ther big package, then."

"No."

"Then say both of 'em."

"I'll tell yer one thing, pard, and thet are I never hits a man when he are down; but ef yer were free from them irons and offered ter pay me ter go agin' my duty, I'd treat yer so mean thet yer face w'd look a heap more like a grizzly hed chawed onder it then it do now. I are a poor man, hevin' only my Overland pay and a leetle I kin win now and then at playin' poker with ther boys; but thar ain't money enough ever gone through on my coach thet c'u'd tempt me ter do a mean act or go back on my duty, and ef yer was innercent as a child, yer'd hev ter go through as far as I goes, and prove it ter them as c'u'd set yer free. Don't talk to me, pard, fer yer hev got me mad clean through."

Sapling Sam subsided, and when Kit Keene turned him over to the next man at the end of his run, he told his fellow driver that he must expect to be bribed by the prisoner, and to look out for him.

The Overland Trail followed by the coaches of the company made what the drivers called a horseshoe bend from Kit Keene's western starting point to the second run from there, going a long way around, and yet coming back again, until the two trails were not over forty miles apart at one place.

This was done partly on account of the mountain difficulties to get over, and partly to touch certain camps and outposts.

The driver who took Sapling Sam from the hands of Kit Keene was a sturdy fellow, true as steel, and when Kit gave him the tip that he might be offered a price to release the prisoner, he was not surprised when that offer came.

Of course, Sapling Sam had the same story to tell, and the old driver listened in silence.

Then came the request to get his money out of his pocket, which had not been returned to the two receptacles in the back of his coat, however.

"What does yer want with yer money?" said Monk, the driver. "Thar ain't no stores in these mountings."

"No, but I wishes ter place jist one thousand dollars in yer hands ter hev yer let me go."

"Pard, does yer see this?" and the revolver of the driver was put close to the face of the prisoner.

"Yas."

"Waal, ef yer hints ag'in thet I are fer sale, I'll jist set yer free sartin, at least, thet part o' yer ther parsons calls ther sperrit."

This settled it with Sapling Sam, as far as Driver Monk was concerned, and he remained quiet the rest of the run.

The "horseshoe" had nearly been made, when, at a relay station, a man got aboard as an inside passenger.

He was a heavily bearded man, in red woollen shirt, corduroy pants, top-boots, and a slouch hat.

He had a rifle, a belt about his waist with a bowie knife and one revolver, and carried, strapped to his back quite a heavy pack.

He looked like a man who had been roughing it for some time, but he spoke with an accent which, with his pack, caused Monk to set him down as a peddler.

"How mooch monies, mine fri'nt, for me to ride m'te coach to Omaha?" he asked.

Monk told him, and the amount was taken out of well-filled purse, and paid over, and then he said:

"I was go to Omaha to puy more goots, mine fri'nt."

Monk told him to jump in, and away the coach rolled once more on its run.

Fifteen miles farther on Monk turned his prisoner, passenger, and freight over to another driver, to whom he gave the same advice as to Sapling Sam, which he had received from Kit Keene.

He got the driver to receipt for the prisoner, and muttered to himself, as the coach rolled away:

"Maybe Ben Haws is honest, and maybe he ain't. dislikes ter misjedge a man, but he ain't my kind o' pard, and it do seem ter me thet ef thet prisoner offer him a heap o' dust, why, somebody will be missin' from ther coach at the end o' Ben Haws' run. Waal, I hev n receipt, so I are clear."

Ben Haws was a young man, and he looked like sport.

He was a good driver, in one way, but pushed his cattle too hard, and was fond of "showing off" when he hit any one on the box with him.

Sapling Sam took him in at a glance.

He was the more careful to study his face since he rebuff from Kit Keene and Monk.

He did not wish to make another mistake.

So he began by complimenting Ben Haws upon his driving, and said:

"I'm something of a driver myself, but you handle ther reins better than any one I ever seen afore. Keen Kit a good one, and Monk ain't bad; but, pard, you do drive ter suit me, and I are almost sorry, fer ef yer w a keerness hand with ther ribbons yer might upset and k me, and I w'd be glad."

"Glad to be killed?" asked Haws.

"Yas."

"Why?"

"Doesn't yer see me in irons?"

"Yes; going to jail, I suppose?"

"Pard, I are in hard luck, fer I am as innercent as t babe. Yer see, I are a Rocky Mountain detective, a I hed about arranged ter corral Major Iron Hand and t gang o' Valley Terrors, when they got me accused robbery, and had me arrested and sent through, as y see me. Now, it are ridikilous ter accuse me o' robbe

when I has dead boodles o' dust, and it were did fer a purpose. Ef I was free, I c'u'd go back and bag ther chief and ther whole lot of 'em, and it's a clear reward from ther government, ther miners, and ther stage company of twenty-five thousand dollars. Of course, I'll be set free soon as I gits ter Omaha, but it will be too late then."

"That is too bad."

"Sartin it are; but to accuse me o' robbery when I hev got thousands with me, give me ter spend in ther captiv' o' ther Valley Terrors."

"You've got thousands with you?"

"Yas; and I'll tell you what I'll do?"

"Well?"

"If I corrals ther Valley Terrors I gits all ther reward, and I kin do it ef I gits away now, so I don't mind giving you a thousand down ter unlock my irons and set me free."

"A thousand dollars is a great deal of money, but I'll lose my place if I let you go."

"Say as how I struck yer in ther head, when yer was going down ther mountains, and stunned yer, so I got ther keys out o' yer pocket and set myself free."

"The Jew peddler inside would know better."

"Durn him, he won't know nothin', fer I'll jist put a revolver onter him and make him light out on ther trail, yer see."

"One thousand dollars?"

"Yes, and you've got money ter see me through, ain't yer?"

"Monk gave me two hundred for the agent, and ter pay yer way."

"Waal, keep thet and say I tuk it."

Ben Haws shook his head.

"Say, I'll make it two thousand. Put your hand in my left side pocket, pard, and yer'll find ther money."

Ben Haws obeyed, and the sight of the new, crisp bills made him excited with joy.

"Count 'em, pard, and say it's a go."

"I'll do it," and he thrust the money into his pocket, took out the keys, and unlocked the irons from the prisoner.

Quick as a flash Sapling Sam seized the revolver from Ben Haws' belt and covered him.

"Now, pard, hold out yer hands!"

The driver begged and swore, but obeyed, and the irons were clasped upon his own wrists, and he was made fast to the coach, which had been brought to a standstill when Haws began to release his prisoner.

The Jew peddler was snoring peacefully within the coach, so Sapling Sam had no fear of him.

Then he took the money from the driver, which Monk had given him, and said:

"I'll borrow one of your leaders, pard, soon as I rob the Jew."

"It vas petter es yer don't rob t'e Jew!"

The words fell upon the ears of the startled Sapling Sam like a clap of thunder from a cloudless sky.

The Jew was leaning out of the coach window, and had his rifle cocked, the muzzle not a foot from the head of the man he addressed.

"Drop down dose weapons, mine fri'nt, or I plows you up mit t'e sky!"

The weapons were laid down as ordered.

"Now, git yourselves down mit t'e pox!"

Sapling Sam obeyed, and then Ben Haws, almost

crushed by the shame of his position, was ordered from the box.

Out sprang the Jew, then unlocked the irons on the driver's wrists, and ordered them put upon the prisoner again.

This was done, and then came the words, with no accent whatever:

"Pard Sapling Sam, I was sent as your guard to Omaha, for it was feared you might try to escape. And you, driver, have had a lesson, so I'll not report your proving false to your trust. But the money given you by this fellow is counterfeit, as he has not a dollar of genuine money with him. Now, Pard Sapling Sam, you ride inside with me, and if you come any funny business, I'll obey my orders, and kill you."

Ben Haws warmly thanked the man who had spared him from exposure, and, mounting his box, drove on, a wiser man by far.

CHAPTER III.

SCOUTS ON THE TRAIL.

Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill were determined to slip away from Kate's Kitchen without the fact being known to other than the landlady and the man who stood guard in the stable.

They had paid their bills and bidden farewell to their hostess and Gambler Lou, and, going to their rooms, had slept for several hours.

Then they slipped out of the hotel, sought the stable, and, having paid the man there a liberal fee, secured their horses, mounting and riding out of the rear way.

"Well, Buffalo, we have given the slip to old White Hair and his redskin pard," said Pawnee Bill, as they gained the trail and headed for the Shadow Valley.

"Yes; but I'd give much to know who that old man is, and why he shadowed us, which he certainly did; but he was game, and friendly, too, for he was at our side in the rumpus to-night."

"Indeed he was, and his Sioux pard, too; but isn't that Bravo a dandy?"

"He is, indeed; but what do you make of his arresting that man Sapling Sam to-night and putting handcuffs upon him?"

"Buffalo, I have thought over that matter until I am tired.

"That Bandbox Bill positively wearies me trying to cipher him out," said Pawnee Bill.

"Yes."

"He said that he was going away."

"So he did."

"Let us go by his lay-out and see if he is there."

"What, then?"

"Well, we can call him up and tell him we were on our way, and wished to again thank him and say good-by, asking him to visit us at the fort when he went there."

"I'm willing; but may he not get up and trail us after we leave?"

"No; for we can ride rapidly, and before he can get ready we will be far away, and the night is too dark for him to track us, and when day comes we can cover up our trail."

"All right. I'd like to know, I confess, if he is really at home, or not."

So the two scouts turned aside and went to the cabin of the Bravo.

They approached it warily, and called out when near.

All was dark within, and no response came.

They called again, with like result, mentioning their names.

But all was silent.

They went around to the stable and listened.

"Pawnee!"

"Yes, Buffalo."

"There is not the photograph of a sound in this stable."

"That means both his horses are gone."

"Yes."

"And the dogs are not in the cabin, I am sure."

"Then the whole lay-out have skipped."

"So it seems."

"Where?"

"I give it up; but let us push on."

And on the two scouts rode.

Both were splendidly mounted, and their horses had had a good rest in Hallelujah City, so they pushed on at a good pace until an hour before dawn, when they went into camp at a place where they had camped on their way to the mines.

Confident that they had thrown their shadowers off their track, they did not worry in the morning, but took it leisurely and several times halted to cover up their tracks.

They wished to enter Shadow Valley at a certain point where they deemed there would be less danger of their meeting any of the Valley Terrors, so camped early, determined to push on the next day on foot, when they had found a hiding place for their horses, as they had decided to take the advice of the Bravo about not going mounted, so as to leave no trail.

Could they find a good hiding place for their animals, they knew they could leave them for twenty-four hours at least.

The place was found, at the head of a cañon, and the horses were fenced into a space where there was good grass and water, the scouts cutting down small trees to serve as a barrier, with hatchets which they always carried.

Then they had supper, and lay down to sleep until midnight, when they arose and started for the Shadow Valley.

They had gone but a mile when a light flashed upon their vision.

The rays came from over a ridge, and they cautiously made their way to where they could obtain a look down into the cañon.

What they beheld fairly startled them, iron-nerved though they were.

They looked down into the head of a cañon, not unlike the one in which they had left their horses.

There was a stream in it, a plot of grass, and some trees.

The ridge surrounding the cañon, and where they stood, was heavily fringed with trees.

There was a fire burning in the cañon, and staked out were five horses, and two more were feeding without being secured.

These latter were as black as jet, and a saddle and a packsaddle lay near them.

Not far from the fire, which cast a cheerful, ruddy glow through the cañon, lay two huge black dogs, apparently resting after a jaunt, and near them were some blankets spread down, showing where some one had made a temporary bed.

But this was not all, for in the cañon were five men.

Two of them were Indians, two were men at work with pick and shovel, and each digging a grave.

The third was Bandbox Bill, the Bravo.

The two scouts gazed at each other in the darkness, as though striving to read each other's thoughts at what they beheld.

The scene fairly startled them, as they gazed down into the cañon.

There were two Indians, whom they never remembered to have seen before, and these stood, rifles in hand, as though guarding the two white men who were digging the graves.

And those two gravediggers?

The scouts did not long remain in ignorance of who they were.

The huge form of the one on the right could be no other than Bully Joe.

On the left was the man who had long been the terror of Hallelujah City.

It was Slim Jones.

Each Indian had his man under guard.

The two men did not work rapidly, but with a heavy manner, and from time to time they cast looks at their redskin guards, and then over at the stern, silent man who paced to and fro, to and fro, not far from them.

The blazing fire cast its rays full upon him, revealing his elegant form, clad in black, his top-boots, with their glittering gold spurs flashing at every step.

His closely buttoned coat, with the rather large sleeves, in which the scouts now knew were deadly revolvers, small, but of heavy caliber.

His broad-brimmed black sombrero partially hid his face, except when he turned toward the firelight in his ceaseless walk.

What could the scene mean, so wild, so weird, so portentous of something appalling to come?

Those two men, Slim Jones and Bully Joe, the scouts knew, had obeyed the man in broadcloth as their master.

He had commanded them to leave Hallelujah City, and they had gone.

The scouts knew that it was their work that had strung Redskin Pete up before the cabin of Bandbox Bill, for the Bravo had told them as much.

He had told them, too, that some one had gone upon their trail, and that they were doomed.

Those two Indians had been the trailers, without doubt.

They had done their trailing well, too.

The Bravo had said that he had to go away.

He had kept his word.

There he was in the cañon, with his two black horses, his dogs, and two redskins, who evidently acknowledged him as their master.

There, too, were the pair of desperadoes.

But whose graves were they digging?

At last Buffalo Bill said in a whisper:

"Pawnee Bill, are those men calmly digging their own graves?"

"It looks so, Buffalo."

"It does, indeed; but they are two to three."

"You mean they should fight it out?"

"Yes."

"But the Bravo is there."

"True; and that means you deem it useless for them to make the attempt?"

"Yes, and more."

"What more?"

"That man commands them by his marvelous force of will, his secret power over them."

"What can it be?"

"I give it up; but they are doing the work, all the same."

The men worked slowly.

It seemed an effort at times to sink their picks into the earth and to shovel out the loose dirt.

The Bravo did not hurry them, but still kept up his tireless passing to and fro.

The Indians stood like bronze statues, silent, but watchful and ready.

"I should think they would make a break and have the redskins shoot them," Buffalo Bill said.

"No, for they would only wing them, I am sure.

"Some moral force keeps those men at work on their own graves, and that force the Bravo exerts."

"Do you think we should interfere?"

"Buffalo, what could we do?"

"Demand that he spare those men."

"Buffalo!"

"Well?"

"This is not our funeral."

"Granted."

"It might be, did we interfere."

"You surely do not fear the man, mysterious being though he is?"

"Don't you know that I never knew what physical fear was?"

"Yes, I grant that; but you spoke as though we would get the worst of it if we interfered."

"We might kill the Bravo from here, true; but those redskins have their orders, and would never allow those two to escape."

"Well, we can do nothing?"

"Why should we, for those men are two of the worst characters in the mountains?"

"That is true."

"They were driven out of Hallelujah, and halted, as we know, to kill the Bravo, and hanged a poor devil by mistake for him."

"He sent those redskins after them, and they have got them fast."

"All true, I admit; but it looks coldblooded to make them dig their own graves, and then kill them."

"That is an idea, and we guess at it from what we see. We will wait and see how it turns out."

Again silence fell between the two scouts, and then Buffalo Bill suddenly asked:

"Bill, what about the man Sapling Sam?"

"Oh, yes, the Bravo yanked him off with him out of the Queen of Hearts Saloon."

"Yes, and where is he?"

"Buffalo, I'm too tired to guess."

"I suppose he has turned up his toes."

"Like as not, for they get lead, steel, and knife epidemics about Hallelujah, as we both discovered; but peace to his sawdust, if he has gone," said Pawnee Bill indifferently.

"Well, when I find Helen Quimby, as I hope to do, I am going to camp on the trail of Bandbox Bill until I know all about him," Buffalo Bill said firmly.

"I'm with you, Buffalo, if from curiosity only; but see, the graves are about finished."

The two desperadoes had ceased their work, and turned toward the Bravo.

He halted in his walk, coolly looked at his watch, and said something in a tone that the scouts could not catch.

That the desperadoes were pleading with him they knew, and they heard his voice ring out sharply:

"Don't be cravens; die like men!"

The desperadoes knelt down in the graves, and the redskins stepped toward them, extending a revolver to each.

Then, before the scouts knew what was to be done, two shots rang out in rapid succession, and Pawnee Bill cried aloud:

"By Heaven! they have taken their own lives, Buffalo."

At his voice, the two dogs sprang up and uttered a warning yelp, and in an instant the Bravo had leaped forward, seized the blankets from the ground, and, dipping them into the brook, threw them over the fire.

At once all was in darkness, and Buffalo Bill said:

"Come, we must go to the cañon and head him off, for he must know what we have seen."

They reached the cañon within ten minutes, but no one was there, other than the two dead desperadoes.

The fire had burned up through the wet blankets and revealed the cañon distinctly again.

But the Bravo, the redskins, horses, trappings, and all were gone, having disappeared with wonderful quickness, and so mysteriously as to bewilder the two scouts.

"Pawnee, that was quick work."

"Yes, Buffalo."

"Well, let us fill in these graves and then go on our way."

"All right, Buffalo," answered Pawnee Bill.

CHAPTER IV.

LARIATED.

The sudden and mysterious disappearance of the Bravo and the two Indians, accompanied by their horses, and taking their traps with them, in so short a space of time, quite bewildered the two scouts for a while.

The graves were there, with their occupants, the revolvers still grasped in the hands of the two dead men.

Slim Jones had shot himself through the brain, while Bully Joe had sent a bullet into his heart.

The fire had burned up brightly through the wet blankets, and the scouts threw on more wood, to make a better blaze.

They hoped, if the Bravo was near and saw them, that he would come and join them.

But this the Bravo did not do, so they went on their way toward the Shadow Valley.

They halted on the ridge overlooking the valley until dawn, eating a cold breakfast, for they cared not to build a fire then, and, when the sun arose, went forward once more.

Their object was to find some trail, and lie in wait there until some one would come along.

If the Woman in Black, they would reveal their presence, and ask her about the kidnaping of Helen Quimby, and if she was then a captive of the Valley Terrors.

If it proved to be an outlaw, they would lariat him, and it would not be their fault if threats did not force him to reveal all he knew, and, perhaps, be their guide to the retreat.

While hoping for the coming of the Woman in Black, they heard hoofs approaching.

They were upon a trail often traveled, and their position enabled them to command a view up and down the valley, while remaining hidden themselves.

They had hidden in a group of rocks upon the banks of a small stream crossed by the trail.

Any one coming along must pass within fifteen feet of them.

On the tops of the rocks grew some stunted trees and bushes, where they lay in hiding; but the rocks seemed placed on the bank of the stream for their especial benefit, for they could glide among them and use the weapons which they had brought along at the suggestion of the Bravo—their lariats.

They had been perhaps an hour in their place of concealment when they heard the sound of hoofs approaching.

Quickly they looked, one in each direction, and Buffalo Bill said:

"It's a horseman, and he is coming at a canter. Quick! to our position for throwing our ropes."

The men at once crouched down among the rocks, ten feet apart.

Buffalo Bill was to throw before Pawnee Bill, and his aim would be the rider.

Pawnee Bill was to lasso the horse.

The man came on, little dreaming of danger.

He was a slim-built, small man, with a red beard and long hair, and dressed in buckskin.

A belt of arms was about his waist and a rifle hung at his saddle horn.

That he was one of the Valley Terrors the scouts were certain.

He was well-mounted upon a wiry horse, a sorrel, and drew rein in the brook to give the animal water.

That was the scouts' chance, and they took advantage of it. Buffalo Bill threw his lariat with sure aim.

Until it settled over him, the man had no thought of peril.

Almost at the same instant, as the startled horse threw up his head, Pawnee Bill sent his coil flying, and it settled around the animal's neck.

The frightened horse, with a loud snort, bounded forward, to be thrown down in the stream as the lariat became taut, for the other end was made fast to a small tree.

The lasso of Buffalo Bill, shorter than the other, had yanked the rider out of the saddle and brought him, with a loud splash, in the water.

The brook was some two and a half feet deep there, so the fall of the horse and rider was broken, and did no harm.

As the man plunged out of the creek, dripping wet, he was met by Buffalo Bill with his revolver.

"Pard, I want you," he said quietly.

The horse was caught by Pawnee Bill, and the two were led around among the rocks.

"Who are yer?" demanded the man, as soon as he could speak.

"That was the question we were about to ask you, and, as we have the call on you, just give us your pedigree, pard," said Cody.

"I am a miner in ther mountains."

"Yes, and you get most of your dust out of pocket mines, I guess."

"I don't understand you."

"Well, I mean you are a Valley Terror."

The man's face paled at this charge; but he said indignantly:

"I am nothing of the kind. I am an honest miner."

"What are you doing in this Shadow Valley, then, for you are not prepared for a long journey?"

"What are you doing here?"

"Looking for just such men as you."

"I am no outlaw."

"Well, we differ with you about that, and we advise you to talk straight, for there is a rope about your neck."

"I have nothing to say, more than I have said."

"Where are you just from?"

"My mine."

"Where is it?"

"Up in the valley."

"There is no mine here."

"That shows you do not know."

"Where are you going?"

"To see a pard."

"Where?"

"Over on the ridge."

"Well, we must search you, my friend."

The man winced at this, and tried to spring away.

But the clutch of the scouts held him firm, and Pawnee Bill soon drew a letter from his pocket.

It was wet, but the address was plain: "Major Iron Hand."

"As you do not carry the United States mail, pard, we'll take the liberty of reading this letter."

And Buffalo Bill opened the envelope and read, written in a woman's hand:

"Come, for you are needed."

W. I. B."

"Pard, this letter would hang you, if we were not disposed to be merciful. Do you deny now that you are Valley Terror?"

"Why do so? For it is useless, I see."

"Who is W. I. B.?"

"I will not tell you."

"Woman in black that might stand for, and I guess it does. Eh, Pawnee Bill?"

"Sure, Buffalo; but what is to be done with this gent?"

"He must talk, if he expects to save his life."

"I have nothing to say," was the dogged response.

"Well, I have a number of questions to ask, and your answers will save your life, or lose it."

"Now, Pard Valley Terror, make up your mind whether you wish to live or die, for I have orders to kill at sight every outlaw of your gang."

And the manner of Buffalo Bill showed that he was, in earnest.

The scouts placed themselves before their prisoners like men who were determined to stand no trifling, and to let the man know who they were, as though by accident, so that he would understand that they had the power to act, Buffalo Bill incidentally called his companion by name.

"Are you Pawnee Bill?" asked the outlaw quickly.

"That's what men call me, pard, and this is Buffalo Bill."

"What, chief of scouts at Fort Benning?" asked the man uneasily.

"Yes."

"Then, if I had you both prisoners I could get a snug sum."

"How so?"

"There is a standing price on your heads among the Valley Terrors."

"You honor us," said Buffalo Bill dryly. "Your words admit that you are a Valley Terror."

"Granted."

"Then talk straight, if you don't wish to die."

"I have nothing to say, as I told you."

"Where are the Valley Terrors?"

"In their retreat."

"Where is that?"

"Anywhere, everywhere."

"Major Iron Hand is your chief?"

"So it is said."

"How many are in your band?"

"Enough to worry all the military and scouts on the border."

"Are you aware that, when taken, none of your men are to be spared?"

"None have been spared when taken, so the future will be no worse than the past."

"Have you any prisoners?"

"I am not the jailer of the band."

"Is there not a young lady captive in your retreat?"

"If I knew, I would not tell you."

"There is a woman in black who is connected with the Valley Terrors?"

"Every one knows that who travels these trails."

"Who is she?"

"A woman in black, is all I know her as."

"Where is she?"

"Attending to her duties somewhere."

"Where is the chief?"

"He is always on duty."

"Pard Buffalo, that fellow has not answered a single question you asked him. Shall I give the rope a pull?"

"No, Pawnee Bill, for I wish to give him every chance before he gets to the end of his rope."

"Well, he had better talk now."

"Once for all, I will not betray my comrades."

"You are a Valley Terror?"

"I am."

"You were going with this message to your chief?"

"I was."

"You refuse to tell, and accept your life?"

"I do, for there is honor among thieves, it is said."

"You do not care for life?"

"I do."

"You can get a handsome sum in money if you will betray them."

"I will not do it."

"Then, Buffalo Bill, he is no good to us, so let's hang him," bluntly said Pawnee Bill.

"Just as you say, Pawnee," and Buffalo Bill placed the lariat about the man's neck.

But he did not flinch.

"There is a tree, so let us run him up to that."

"All right," and they led the man to the tree.

He walked firmly, and though his face was very pale, he showed no sign of fear.

Pawnee Bill threw one end of the rope over the limb, while Buffalo Bill bound the man's hands behind him.

Then the latter said:

"Just five minutes to tell what you know, and get a reward, in the bargain, with your life and freedom, or to hang."

"I'll hang," was the cool response.

"You've got nerve, anyhow."

"I need it in my lawless calling, and took my life in my hands when I entered upon it. It is death sooner or later, so go ahead."

The two scouts looked at each other, and Pawnee Bill said bluntly:

"Pard, you've got too much nerve for an outlaw, and ought to be a square man. I am sorry you will not confess what we wish to know; but we won't hang you, and had no idea of doing so."

"That's just what I thought, Buffalo Bill."

"You did, eh?"

"Yes."

"And why?"

"I have heard much of you two men, and never yet that you were guilty of a mean act, or of killing a man in cold blood, so I did not believe you would hang me."

"What are we to do with him, Pawnee?"

"Ask me something easy, Buffalo."

"You cannot let him go."

"Certainly not."

"As we cannot get anything out of him, he is an elephant on our hands."

"I'd rather have an old buffalo bull for my share."

The outlaw laughed outright.

"You are a funny chap, pard."

"Oh, I take life as it comes and goes."

"Well, Buffalo, let us put the nippers on him and gag him, so if any other durned fool comes along he can't yelp and give us away."

"All right; we'll put him in a safe place."

The outlaw was then ironed, and his feet tied to his hands so that he could not escape.

He made no resistance, and Buffalo Bill said:

"I hate to treat you badly, pard, for I admire your pluck; but I must."

"Oh, certainly, for I'd give you away if I could."

"Well, I'll have to gag you."

"That's not pleasant, but go ahead."

He was accordingly securely gagged, and they were about to take him farther over among the rocks, when the splashing of water startled them.

They had been so thoroughly wrapped up in their prisoner that for once they had forgotten their caution.

There was some one coming along the trail, and crossing the brook.

They sprang to a position for resistance, if need be, and, a moment after, a horse and rider came in sight, not fifty feet from them.

CHAPTER V.

A PROMISE.

"Holy smoke! Buffalo, it's the Woman in Black," hoarsely whispered Pawnee Bill, as the rider and horse came into view.

"It is," answered Cody, and he quickly added:

"You shin around the rocks and head her off in her trail, while I come out behind her, for she cannot escape us then."

This plan was speedily adopted, and the horsewoman drew rein as she saw Pawnee Bill step out in the trail before her.

Then she wheeled her horse as though to retreat by the brook.

There she beheld Buffalo Bill in the trail.

Upon one side was the ragged group of rocks and the thicket, which no horse could pass over.

Upon the other was a deep water wash, fully twenty feet wide.

For an instant she seemed about to drive her horse to take the leap, but with a start of only a couple of lengths she seemed to realize that he could not make it.

Seeing that she was trapped, she remained silent and expectant, while the two scouts approached her.

Right where she had halted was the bound prisoner, not thirty feet away from her, but out of sight.

The scouts gazed upon the woman with strange interest as they approached her.

She was certainly a superb-looking woman, with faultless form, clad in deep black, and sitting in her saddle like a queen.

Her face was very pale, her eyes large and lustrous, and both the scouts had the same thought at once that they had known her somewhere.

But they could not place her, try as they might.

She bowed haughtily as they advanced, and, in spite of their belief that she was an outlaw, they raised their sombreros.

"May I ask if you deem me your prisoner, sirs?" she said, in a voice that was strangely musical, and to which there was the tinge of a foreign accent.

"If you are the Woman in Black, we came to the Shadow Valley to see you," Buffalo Bill responded.

"And why, may I ask?"

"We have known of kind acts that you have done, of men that you have warned of danger in this valley, and we felt that you could not be wholly bad."

"I have done what I deemed my duty, serving two masters though I have had to."

"Two masters?"

"Yes, conscience and one other."

"You have certainly served your conscience well, for not long since you saved Keen Kit's coach from robbery."

"Worse, perhaps; in fact, far worse."

"And you have warned others of dangers in this valley."

"Therein I was serving my conscience."

"Well, we are anxious to have you do another good deed."

"Name it."

"Had you seen us here, before we discovered you, would you have warned us of danger?"

"Yes."

"May I ask if you are really connected with the band of outlaws known as the Valley Terrors?"

"Of myself I have nothing to say."

"Will you tell us if there is not a captive among the Valley Terrors?"

"There are several."

"One is a young girl?"

"Ah! Who do you mean?"

"Miss Quimby."

"Do you deem her a captive?"

"Yes."

"She came of her own free will."

"Did she tell you so?"

"I have not spoken with her."

"Who told you so?"

"The one who brought her to the valley."

"And he is——"

"The second in command of the Valley Terrors."

"Well, I happen to know that she was kidnaped, as my

friend, here, also does, and that you have not been permitted to see her is further proof."

"It may be so."

"Do you know one who is called the Bravo in Broadcloth?"

The woman started, and asked quickly:

"What know you of him?"

"We owe him our lives."

"So do many others owe him the same debt."

"He is dwelling in Hallelujah City now."

"So I have heard; but what causes you to speak to me of him?"

"We told him that we were coming to the Valley of the Shadow of Death to rescue Miss Quimby, feeling confident that she had been kidnaped."

"Well?"

"He advised us to seek you, and you could tell."

"Sent he no message?"

"None."

"He said nothing more?"

"No."

"Well, I will see what I can discover for you, as to Miss Quimby being a willing or unwilling sojourner here. If the latter, I will aid you; but if the former I will not interfere."

"We can ask no more, certainly."

"Where are you camping?"

"We are in temporary hiding among the rock. By Jupiter! I forgot all about the prisoner."

"As I did, Buffalo."

"What prisoner, may I ask?"

The scouts looked troubled, and Buffalo Bill responded:

"Unintentionally we have betrayed you."

"How so?"

"We caught a horse and rider a while ago with our lassoes, and we could not force him by threats or bribes to tell us anything we wished to know."

"A man on a sorrel horse?"

"Yes."

"A courier?"

"Yes, he bore a letter which we read."

"To Major Iron Hand?"

"Yes."

"Where is your prisoner?"

"Bound and gagged, and just over behind that rock."

"Then he has heard all?" and the woman's face showed her anxiety.

"He has, I fear."

"Then he must not escape, for you do not know how fearful would be the result."

"He is a plucky fellow, and we hated to cause him to suffer."

"Yes, he is a brave man; but he is true as steel to his outlaw comrades, and it would be better to kill him than that he should escape. I mean just what I say, as some day you may know."

"He shall not escape, I promise you."

"See to it that he does not, sir, I beseech you."

The woman was in deadly earnest now, and the scouts saw it.

Then Buffalo Bill asked:

"When will you tell us of Miss Quimby?"

"Two days from this, at noon. I will show you where I will meet you."

"You cannot do so before?"

"No, it is impossible."

"Then lead us to where we are to meet you."

"In the meantime, keep out of this valley."

"Yes, we will."

"And do not let this man Iron Heart Dick escape."

"We will see to it that he does not."

She leaned forward and whispered:

"Follow my trail when I have disappeared from sight in yonder timber. Blindfold your prisoner, and when you come to a retreat into which I have ridden and turned, back in, make it your camping place until I come there two days from this."

"We will do so; but can we bring our horses there? We left them out of the valley?"

"Yes, it would be better to have them with you. Now I will go," and, with a wave of her hand, she rode off.

Half an hour after, they followed, having mounted the prisoner upon his horse.

A walk of several miles brought them again in sight of the woman, evidently awaiting them.

Buffalo Bill walked forward alone, and she said:

"You already know the spot, for I observed your horses there. I will be there in two days," and again she rode away.

"Well, this is a surprise party," said Pawnee Bill, as he discovered that the rendezvous appointed by the Woman in Black was where they had concealed their own horses.

Meantime, Surgeon Powell and Texas Jack, in their disguises, the one as an Indian, the other an old trapper, were creeping along on the trail of Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill. Had Buffalo Bill and his pard, Pawnee Bill, known the identity of the men whom they were trying to throw off their track, they would have given it up as a useless undertaking.

The two Bills had been friends with Surgeon Frank Powell and Texas Jack too long not to know that they were their equals in prairiecraft, cunning, and courage.

The four had scouted many a time together, and stood back to back in desperate fights for life.

They were true as steel to one another, and both Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill, if told to select two pards who should go on a trail of desperate danger with them, would at once have chosen Frank Powell and Texas Jack.

In fact, they felt great regret, and so expressed themselves, that the surgeon and the Texan were not near to be able to go with him on the trip to Hallelujah City.

When, therefore, Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill slipped away from Kate's Kitchen at night, as they believed, unseen by their shadowers, the surgeon and the Texan followed them on foot until they saw just what trail they intended to take.

Then they returned to the hotel, and, paying the clerk, whom they aroused, they mounted their horses and rode as far as Bandbox Bill's cabin.

Here they halted for the remainder of the night, as they knew the Bravo was away from home, and they did not care to go wrong on the trail of the two Bills.

With the dawn, they had breakfast, and then, mounting, they rode on.

They were too experienced as trailers to be at a loss to follow the trail of the scouts, and when they knew that they had gained on them until the two Bills were not very far ahead, they went at a slower pace.

But the nature of the ground soon became such that to

follow the trail was slow and tedious work, and at times they became alarmed about finding the tracks when lost.

They knew that the two Bills were going toward the Shadow Valley, and they had the alternative of pushing on there, if they utterly lost their trail.

But they persevered, and at last got on the right track again.

All the next day their progress was slow; but they came, near night, upon the retreat where the horses had been left; but they ventured no farther than to see that it was their camp.

Then they knew that the scouts had made that spot their base of operations, and they established themselves not far away, in a secluded nook.

By some means Texas Jack's horse had slipped his halter, and was gone the next morning, and, evidently remembering his good treatment at the stable of Kate's Kitchen, he had taken the back trail in that direction.

Mounting Surgeon Powell's horse, Texas Jack set off in search of his own animal, and it was late in the night before he returned.

But he brought back the runaway with him.

This brought the time down to the day when the Woman in Black was to visit the retreat of Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill.

Surgeon Powell and Texas Jack had a late breakfast, and seemed in no hurry to move, for Frank Powell had reconnoitered late the evening before, and told the Texan that the scouts were still in their retreat.

"Well, doc, I guess we had better go over and join them, this morning, and make ourselves known," said Jack.

"We'll happen in on them, Jack, and not give our secret away until we have had some fun with them about following their trail."

"Good! We'll get Pawnee Bill mad, and then tell them who we are."

This being decided upon, the two mounted their horses toward noon and rode over in the direction of the camp of the scouts.

They went along a ridge which gave them a view of a level stretch of land, and at once they beheld a party of horsemen riding slowly along, and evidently following a trail.

The trail led in the direction of the scout's retreat, and Surgeon Powell remarked:

"We have not the time to warn them, Jack; but we can get there to the funeral."

"Yes, and they'll be glad we followed their trail, I'm thinking, for there are just a dozen men in yonder party."

"Yes, too many for even Cody and Pawnee to fight alone, especially as these men must be Valley Terrors. But we will even up matters some, and then the surprise we will give the outlaws will count for a good deal, Jack."

"You bet it will, doc; but let us be making our way to the scene, for we must not arrive too late."

"No; and I only hope that the outlaws will not surprise them. If we had only been half an hour sooner!"

"But we were not, so let us be moving, and, Jack, I guess we are going to have a lively time of it."

"Well, it won't be a picnic for us, I am certain."

With this, the two friends rode on, and Texas Jack took off his spectacles, which went to prove that he wished nothing to destroy his aim in the strife which he was sure must come.

CHAPTER VI.

MEXICAN MONTE.

One meeting Mexican Monte would never dream that he was an outlaw, the trusted lieutenant of Major Iron Hand, the mysterious chief of the Valley Terrors.

He was a fine-looking young man, with the dark face and black hair and black eyes of a Mexican.

He affected the Mexican dress, was a good deal of a dandy in his make-up, and was as cruel as his looks were innocent.

He rode along a trail one afternoon, some days before Helen Quimby left the fort, and was smoking a cigarrito with the air of one who had nothing upon his mind, and was at peace with the world in general.

He held on his way to a spur of the mountain, where he could view a vast expanse of country. He placed a glass to his eyes and looked over the expanse, his vision following a trail faintly outlined for miles.

"He is coming," he muttered, as he saw a horseman coming along the trail.

As the horseman drew nearer the trail, he unrolled a red flag, attached it to his rifle, and, with the breech upon his thigh, thus rode along, allowing the little square of silk to flutter as he moved.

Mexican Monte drew from his pocket a red flag, and, placing it upon a stick, he waved it three times, and the horseman in the valley came on at a gallop.

The man coming along the trail was in uniform, and his equipments were military.

He was well armed and accoutered for the road.

Upon reaching the top of the spur, he saluted Mexican Monte politely, and the latter asked abruptly:

"Well, how goes on at the fort, Marquand?"

"As well as you could wish, Captain Monte."

"What have you done?"

"I have my allies ready to spring a trap when opportunity offers, sir."

"How many have you in your pay?"

"A woman and two men."

"Are they enough for the work?"

"Ample, sir."

"There must be no failure."

"There shall not be, Captain Monte."

"Give me notice in time, when you intend to spring your trap."

"I have as one of my allies, sir, a scout, a perfect borderman, and he shall leave with news to you the moment all is arranged."

"Accomplish this for me, Marquand, and I will make you a rich man; but if you fail me, I fail, too, and I shall have to continue an outlaw, but not as second in command, for it frets me to have a master."

"You do not like Chief Iron Hand, then, sir?"

"Oh, I like him well enough, yes; but he is as haughty as Lucifer, and, more, I do all the work, for he is seldom with the men."

"You think he will give up the command, sir?"

"I don't know that he would willingly; but he will under my persuasion, and you shall step into my shoes and be my lieutenant, Marquand."

"You are kind to me, Captain Monte."

"No, I am just, for you have been true as steel; but, mind you, I am talking now of what will be if our plot fails. If it is successful, why, we will be rich, give up outlawry, and live as gentlemen far from here."

"Heaven grant the plot is a success, sir, for this is a life of terrible risk we lead."

"Yes, I grant it is; but if we fail, then, as chief, I will gain a fortune by lawless acts, and this Overland will ring with my deeds of daring. But you must not delay here, so return to the fort, while I go back to my den of thieves," and Mexican Monte laughed.

"A few banknotes won't go amiss, captain, for I have to pay liberally, you know."

"Ah, yes," and the Mexican handed over a roll of bills, which Marquand put into his pocket, and, saluting, rode away.

The Mexican watched him for a while, and then turned his horse back on the trail he had come.

A ride of a dozen miles brought him to the head of the Shadow Valley.

A narrow cañon, cutting through a mountain range, was the pass into the valley at that end, and there was stationed a mounted sentinel.

Mexican Monte stopped and talked with him for a few minutes, and then rode on into the pass.

Half a mile beyond was a camp in the very fastness of the rugged range.

It was the camp of the Valley Terrors, their abiding place for the time being, for they seldom remained a month in one place.

The camp was one that could move away in fifteen minutes' warning.

Though the Valley Terrors seemed to have no regular retreat, they had a score of secure camping grounds which could be well defended, and they seemed to haunt the Valley of the Shadow of Death more than any other locality.

Riding up to an army tent upon the hillside, Mexican Monte dismounted, threw the rein of his horse to a peon Indian that came forward, and asked, in the Mexican tongue:

"Any news, Ponto?"

"None, señor."

"Any word from the chief?"

"No word has come to your quarters, señor."

"Where is the fair spy the chief has upon our movements?"

And Mexican Monte spoke with a sneer.

"Off on the trails, señor, for she has not returned since leaving this morning."

The young outlaw officer made no reply, but threw himself into a hammock swung near his tent, and was soon fast asleep.

Hardly had his eyes closed in slumber before a horsewoman rode past his quarters.

It was the Woman in Black, and she passed on up the hill to where several army tents were grouped together; but, like the tent of the Mexican officer, they were all painted a dark brown.

She threw herself into a campchair in front of her tent, and seemed lost in viewing the scene before her, the two-score of outlaws encamped upon the hillside below her, their horses feeding in the valley, and the grand expanse of cañons, vales, and mountains.

Certainly it was a strange fatality which had brought that woman to be a dweller among outlaws, for hers was not the face of one whose heart was wicked.

It seemed a cruel destiny for her to follow, and the sorrow that seemed stamped upon her beautiful face showed

that she suffered deeply at her lot. A negress now brought her a cup of coffee.

The same afternoon a messenger came into the camp to see Mexican Monte.

He handed him a letter, also written in cipher, and quite a lengthy one.

Whatever its contents, it seemed to interest the Mexican deeply, for he read it over and over again.

Then he said to the messenger, who had the appearance of being a scout:

"You had the signals, of course?"

"Yes, captain, they were given to me by Marquand."

"Is your horse able to return at once?"

"Marquand said you would give me a fresh horse, captain."

"I will. Go get some food, and here is a reminder that you must go back with all speed," and he placed some money in the man's hands.

"When you return, say to Marquand that the plan is a splendid one, and cannot fail, for I will carry out his every suggestion."

"Yes, captain," and the man departed with the peon, who fed him well, and then got for him a fine horse from his master's corral.

The next night Mexican Monte mounted his best horse and rode away from the camps.

He passed by the quarters of the Woman in Black, and said, as he raised his sombrero:

"I am going upon a special scout for a couple of days, and when I return I expect to bring company. Should the chief arrive meanwhile, pray explain my absence, and will you please take command until my return?"

The Woman in Black simply bowed, making no response whatever.

As Mexican Monte passed on, she muttered:

"He has some black deed on hand, I know; but I have not one near that I can send on his trail. Yes, he got a message while I was absent, Cynthia, the negress, told me, and that is what carries him away. Some one, he says, will return with him—Heaven have mercy upon them!"

"Ah, there go four men up from the camps, and they will accompany him, I am sure! Yes, one is that outlawed pony rider of the Pacific trail, and the other three are as precious a trio of rascals as there are in the band. There is some deviltry going on, I am sure, but just now I am powerless to discover what it is."

The Woman in Black was correct about the three men going to follow on the trail of Mexican Monte, for they overtook him before he had gotten a mile away from the cañon camp of the Valley Terrors.

Mexican Monte had picked his men well, and he knew just what he had for them to do.

He led the way, and late that night they went into a camp in a snug retreat not very far from the Overland Trail.

Here they prepared to make themselves comfortable, for the two packhorses were unsaddled, and their packs revealed a very good supply of clothing and provisions had been brought along.

Mexican Monte evidently did not deem a guard necessary, for none was placed, and the men were allowed to cook supper and turn into their blankets at will.

The next morning no move was made, and not until after the noon meal did the little camp awaken to life.

Then one of the packs was opened, and revealed a side

saddle, some soldiers' uniforms, and a costume such as was worn by the Overland Pony Express riders in those days.

Not long after, a man rode into camp.

It was the scout who had visited the outlaw officer the day before.

He carried a bundle with him, which he gave to Mexican Monte, along with a letter, and, after a short rest and some dinner, departed, with the remark:

"Marquand thinks it best I should return at once, captain."

"Yes, and he says there will be no mistake at his end of the line."

"None, captain, for you have the skirt and hat, along with other things he sent, and the letters are written and all ready."

"Good! Then there shall be no mistake at this end of the line, for my men know just what they have to do," and Mexican Monte seemed to be in a good humor with all mankind as he watched the messenger ride away.

Half an hour after, the young man, who had once been a Pony Express rider, put on his rig, and, receiving a letter and some instructions from Mexican Monte, mounted his horse and rode out of camp.

Two hours after his departure the other three men, dressed up in the uniform of cavalry soldiers and also left the camp, after certain instructions from their leader, and they carried with them a led horse.

Then Mexican Monte was left alone, and he began to pace to and fro.

The shadows deepened in the cañon, and darkness came.

Then the man threw some wood upon the live coals of the camp fire and had a cheery blaze.

The firelight made weird, dancing shadows about him; but he heeded them not, but paced to and fro until hours passed.

Then he started, for sounds came to his ears.

Soon after, four horses, with riders, rode into the cañon and up to the camp fire.

The Mexican sprang forward, and said to one who rode by the side of the outlaw wearing a sergeant's uniform:

"Señorita Helen Quimby, I am glad to meet you again."

"Monte Miranda! My Heaven! How I have been deceived!"

The one who uttered the almost despairing words was Helen Quimby.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CAPTIVE.

For a moment, after recognizing how she had been trapped, Helen Quimby seemed almost overcome.

Then she rallied quickly, and her splendid pluck came back to her, and she asked, with indignant anger:

"What does this outrage mean, Monte Miranda?"

"It means that when I visited you at the fort I read a proposition to you which you were pleased to refuse. I have decided to carry out my plan, and so kidnaped you."

"It was a most clever plot, and as a villain you are to be congratulated upon your cleverness."

"We will discuss that as we ride along, for I prefer not to remain here.

"Come, my gallant pony rider and soldiers, we must be on the march, so resume your true colors, pack up,

and get ready. I will see that our fair captive does not escape."

Thus ordered, the men set to work, while Monte stood by the side of the young girl's horse, his hand upon her bridle rein.

"You have time to explain this outrage now, sir, if explanation you can give."

"I can explain, oh, yes, but whether the explanation will be satisfactory to you I do not know."

"I will be the judge, sir."

"Well, fair señorita, I visited you when you were in New York at boarding school."

"I know that well, sir."

"I was then an officer of lanceros in the Mexican army, and you were a mere schoolgirl; but I explained to you my situation, and yours."

"I understood your situation thoroughly, sir."

"I told you that I would come again, in time."

"And you came."

"Yes, I sought you at the fort, when your father was in Washington Territory."

"Perhaps it was well for you that he was away."

"Perhaps; but I visited you, and you again refused my love."

"I did."

"Although you knew how much was at stake upon your answer."

"I preferred not to sacrifice my happiness, sir, by marrying a man whom I despised."

"Despised! Why, girl, women have not found me despicable."

"They have not read your character as I have. They have only seen your handsome face, fine form, and looked not into your heart."

"You speak as though you knew me to be a villain."

"I suspected you were at heart a villain when you first visited me in New York. When you came to the fort I was more convinced that you were, and now I am assured of it."

"You are not complimentary."

"Because I am truthful."

"Well, you have ruined me, for, had I returned to Mexico with the pledge that I asked from you, all would have gone well; but, instead, I held no such pledge. I was overwhelmed with debts, and shot my most importunate creditor, a brother officer, in a duel, as a warning to others not to drive me; but they were too numerous, so I was forced to resign from the service."

"You were forced to desert and were dismissed, for I read it in a Mexican paper."

"Ah! you keep up with the times, then?"

"Yes, even with the Mexican times," and Helen laughed.

"Then you know all I lost from your refusal to sign the paper I asked?"

"I knew when you visited the fort that you were a fugitive from Mexico, though I did not tell you so. For the sake of appearance, I received you as a gentleman whom I had known before. When you left, you had my decided answer, and promised never to come near me again. Now, by one of the boldest plots I ever knew, you have kidnaped me."

"It was clever, was it not? It shows what a genius I have."

"I never doubted your genius for wrongdoing; but you have had allies at the fort to carry out your plan so successfully."

"I grant that."

"To-morrow, however, you will find that you have made a mistake, for my father will have a regiment upon your track."

"See here, sweet Helen, what care I for a regiment, when the frontier army have been on my track for over a year?"

"Ha! that means——"

"What would you say?"

"You are an outlaw."

"You just said you had read in the Mexican paper that I was a deserter and fugitive."

"Yes, and the terrible suspicion forces itself upon me that you are Major Iron Hand."

The young Mexican laughed, but made no reply.

His vanity was such that he was willing to be thought the famous outlaw, Iron Hand.

"You do not deny it."

"I deny nothing, neither do I admit anything."

"Well, I can believe anything of you, Monte Miranda."

"Thank you!"

"Now tell me why you have kidnaped me?"

"Don't you know?"

"If I did, I would not ask."

"You know what I urged upon you, once before?"

"Yes; to pledge myself to become your wife."

"That is it."

"And you expect such pledge from me now?"

"I expect more."

"More! What is your demand?"

"That you become my wife and return with me to Mexico."

"I will die by my own hand before I would do so," was the plucky response.

And, the men being ready for the march, Monte gave the order to mount, and they moved away into the darkness.

The horse ridden by Helen had a rope about its neck, and the other end was made fast about the horn of Monte's saddle.

The ex-pony rider, who had so well done his work, rode in advance with one of the men, and the others followed close behind with the packhorse, so that escape through making a bold dash faded from the heart of poor Helen.

Nature certainly aided the villain, Monte, in keeping his captive a secure prisoner.

He returned to his camp, and, upon the side of an overhanging cliff, forty feet from the ground, was a shelf of rock.

Back of this projection was an opening some dozen feet in depth and as many wide, and the front had been walled up with logs, thus forming a pleasant room.

A cot, an easy camp chair, and a rude table comprised the furniture of the room, and some books, a guitar, and a large bundle of clothing, which had been taken by Marquand from Helen's rooms, and sent to the outlaw camp, were on the cot.

Such was the position of the young girl, and the place was reached by the narrowest of paths up the side of the cliff, here and there made safer by a log or rail. At the bottom an outlaw guard was stationed, so that escape was wholly prevented.

The Mexican had the quarters all ready for his captive upon her arrival, and, viewing the place, as she reached the shelf of rock, she said coolly:

"Better quarters by far than I expected, and the view

from here is grand. I see a negress over there, Monte Miranda, so I suppose you will allow her to bring my meals and serve me?"

The man was nonplused by the cool courage of the girl, and replied:

"I will ask the permission of the Woman in Black for the negress to do so."

"Ah! The Woman in Black? She, then, is a friend of yours?"

"No. She is here, however."

"I have heard much of her, and such strange stories are told about her. I would so love to see her."

"That cannot be; but Cynthia, her negro servant woman, I will ask to look after you."

"Thank you; but this, then, is the camp of the Valley Terrors?"

"Yes."

"How picturesque! And to think that I am a captive of outlaws. It is really most romantic, Señor Miranda."

He hardly knew what to say, for her bantering manner nonplused him.

Then she asked, in the same light manner:

"How many cutthroats have you in your band, Monte Miranda?"

"Enough to keep at bay all the soldiers your father may send here."

"I doubt it, for if Buffalo Bill leads them as guide, you'll find that the soldiers will be here some pleasant morning."

"You forget what I told you?"

"I really cannot recall to what you refer."

"That I left a forged letter in your room to your father, that you had left him of your own free will."

She winced at this, but answered:

"Was the forgery of my writing a good one?"

"Perfect."

"Ah, yes; I recall now also that you were said in the papers to be a clever forger, and had written certain autographs of others so pat that you really got money upon them. Well, maybe father will be deceived, but I doubt it."

"I am sure that he will; and expect no further pursuit of you, for I had your clothes and other things taken from your room and brought here."

"I am glad of that."

"Yes; for it will seem that you really did desert your father and run away."

"Alas! so it will."

"Then, my ally at the fort will spread the rumor that when your father was up in the Columbian country I visited you there, and was supposed to be your lover, and, as I had been seen of late about the fort, it was proof that you had run off with me."

"You have played your cards boldly and well, Monte Miranda; but let me ask what your intention is regarding me?"

"I'll tell you that the first parson or priest my men can catch they will bring here, and he shall make you my wife."

"I prefer death to you."

"I'll see to it that you live, at least until it is known in Mexico that you are my wife. Then I can return there, for I'll soon arrange any trouble there may be brought against me. Now you know my plan, and if you submit gracefully all will be well, and I will make concessions to you; but, if you refuse, it will be the

worst for you. Here are your quarters, and here you are to remain. I will send the negress to you, and you will not suffer here, I feel assured."

With this, Monte turned upon his heel and left the captive alone with her own thoughts.

He wended his way over to the quarters of the Woman in Black, who received him in the same cold, haughty manner.

"Señora, I have a favor to ask of you."

"Well, sir?"

"I have a captive in a retreat on the cliff, upon the keeping of whom a great deal depends, and it will benefit the chief as well as myself. She is a young girl, and I ask you to allow your negress, Cynthia, to look to her wants, if you will be so kind."

"Cynthia shall care for her, and I will also see that she wants for nothing that I can supply her with. Where is she from?"

"The fort."

"I fear you have overstepped your authority, sir."

"No, the chief will be satisfied with the explanation I offer, I am convinced."

"It is for the chief to decide, of course, Señor Monte," and the woman bowed as though to terminate the interview.

Mexican Monte turned away and went to his own quarters.

The woman he did not understand, and he stood in awe of her.

He knew that she hated him from the day the chief had brought her to his camp, and though he, Monte, was in command of the band in the absence of Major Iron Hand, he was well aware that the word of the Woman in Black was law, and that the men would disobey him before they would her, if it came to a question between them of which should rule.

The men feared her as he did, and their chief they stood in terror of, though he was ever kind to them they were forced to admit.

"Never mind, I will soon make Helen my wife, and then I'll leave this life of peril and outlawry for one of wealth and happiness," mused Mexican Monte.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SCOUTS AT BAY.

To say that Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill were not anxious, as to the position they found themselves in, would not be correct, for they were.

They had, as it were, an "elephant on their hands," in the outlaw prisoner.

He had shown a nerve and a sense of honor they had not expected to find in an outlaw, and so had put them in an unfortunate position. They had met and talked with the Woman in Black, and she had given them at least cause to hope that they could rescue Helen Quimby.

This was their paramount object now, and they could work at trailing the Valley Terrors afterward.

But this prisoner bothered them.

He was cunning, bold, and fearless, and they knew that to hold him they would have to be severe in their treatment of him.

He told them that he had heard what the Woman in Black had said, and he was amazed to find that she was a traitress.

She was second only to the chief in power in the band,

and to feel that she might, at any moment, betray them all, was a surprise and cause of anxiety to the outlaw.

If he could only escape, he would at once denounce the Woman in Black and save the band from destruction.

But to escape was no easy matter.

He was ironed, and a lariat passed around a tree kept him from going away.

Then, too, one of the scouts was constantly near him.

Buffalo Bill had gone out for a short hunt, upon the morning when Texas Jack and Surgeon Powell had discerned the coming horsemen, and fortunately he also made the discovery of danger approaching.

Hastening to the cañon, he made known what he had seen.

To escape from the cañon with their prisoner was impossible.

Had it not been for him they could have mounted their horses and sped away.

They were, however, unable to do so with a led horse and a prisoner.

To set him free would be to put the life of the Woman in Black in danger from what he could tell of her.

But the thought came then that perhaps she had betrayed them, after all.

They saddled their horses, made the prisoner mount, and secured him to his saddle.

Then they led his horse and theirs into a space where they would be out of bullet range, and took up a position to await the coming of the outlaws.

They had not long to wait, for the horsemen soon appeared in the cañon, and halting, half of them dismounted and took to ambush fighting methods.

They sent a volley into the scouts' position, and then threatened a grand charge; but the two rifles cracked from the covert, and a horse and an outlaw went down.

This taught the Valley Terrors that they had to fight men who were dangerous.

So they began cunning tactics.

All dismounted and began to creep upon the position of the scouts.

Shots were exchanged, so that a scattering fire was kept up, but the damage done was slight.

The scouts fired seldom and then only when they believed that they could kill or wing a foe.

The outlaws fired often, however; but they still kept drawing in the line about the scouts.

When but a hundred yards away from the rocks that served as a breastwork for the two Bills, hoofs were heard and half a dozen men rode up.

They were outlaws, and the game seemed now a most desperate one for the two men at bay to play.

Still, calm, determined, and fearless, the two Bills faced their foes.

If they had to die they would perish with a record for having fought to the end.

But they still had some ray of hope, for they were not men to give up, no matter what the odds were against them.

When the other outlaws came it made the force about ten to one against them; but Buffalo Bill quietly remarked:

"We have been in just as tight places before, Pard Pawnee, and gotten out."

"Yes, and if we don't get out of this we'll have company on the trail to the happy hunting grounds," replied Pawnee Bill.

"You are brave ones, pards, and I delight in seeing you at bay; but the odds will down you, pards, game as you are and deadly in your aim," said the prisoner, who coolly watched the situation.

"Well, what is our loss will be your gain, pard, for you'll escape the rope, if we are doomed," Pawnee Bill responded.

It was now seen that the outlaws had decided upon a rush.

The horses of all of them were being grouped together down the cañon, and were to be sent on a rush for the scouts' position, with half a dozen men driving them from the rear.

As they swept down upon the position, the outlaws on foot were to spring from their various places and run toward the little fort of rocks.

Certainly, though some must fall, the others would reach the goal, and when it came to a hand-to-hand combat between a dozen men and two, even though those two were Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill, there could be but one ending to it.

The start was made, and just as the horses dashed up the cañon, and the outlaws were springing from their position, even the scouts were startled to hear the rattling of revolvers from overhead, and to see horses and men go down.

A perfect hail of bullets was falling in the cañon, and the scouts, without wasting time to see who was befriending them, opened fire also.

The result was that the charge was checked, the mounted men wheeled their horses and dashed back for cover, while the loose horses ran here, there, and everywhere.

The outlaws on foot quickly sought cover, to be run out of it at once, for the unknown enemy above commanded their positions, and they fled from rock to rock, tree to tree, down the cañon to shelter around the turn, while a loud voice called out:

"Up to the ridge, half a dozen of you, and dislodge those devils, for there are only two of them."

"Only two? I thought there was a dozen from the music they made. They are dandies, Buffalo," said Pawnee Bill.

"Yes, and our friends, Pawnee; but who are they?"

"See there!" and Pawnee Bill pointed overhead to where a man was visible coming over the cliff and down a lariat made fast to a tree above.

"The old trapper, as I yet live!" cried Buffalo Bill.

"Sure, and yonder comes the red," was Pawnee Bill's response.

The two upon the ridge, who had so promptly come to the rescue of the scouts, slid rapidly down the lariat, landing within a few rods of their comrades.

"Pards, we is heur fer biz," announced Texas Jack.

"Bless your old white head, you are a man, every bit of you, to come and take chances with us," said Buffalo Bill earnestly, and he added:

"And your noble red pard, too; but we are in close quarters."

"Yas, but we kin git yer out ef yer wants ter leave yer critturs, and ef not, we'll jist camp with yer and attend ther ball."

Quickly Buffalo Bill explained the situation, and then, as he looked squarely into the face of the supposed trapper, he said:

"See here, now that you have not your eyes hidden

behind spectacles, I can see that they are not old eyes. No, I should know them, and—— By Heaven! you are Texas Jack."

"True for you, Pard Buffalo Bill. Surgeon Frank and I have had our fun with you and Pawnee Bill."

"Surgeon Frank Powell?"

"Yes, done up in colors," said the surgeon.

And Buffalo Bill sprang forward and grasped his hand, while Pawnee Bill, after a genial handshaking, said:

"I thought it was asking a little too much of ordinary human nature for two men to come into this death trap to help strangers. But, pards, I feel now as if we had a right to back us."

"Yes; and I think my pards will find they have caught a nest of Tartars—my! Buffalo Bill, Frank Powell, the surgeon scout, Texas Jack, and Pawnee Bill! What a handful of trumps! what a team to fight! If the Valley Terrors only knew it."

Texas Jack and Surgeon Powell turned toward the speaker.

It was the outlaw prisoner, and Texas Jack said:

"Where did you get him, pards?"

"Caught him."

"Why not use him as a foil?" asked Surgeon Powell.

"How do you mean?"

"Is he an outlaw?"

"Yes."

"Those men attacking you are Valley Terrors?"

"Yes."

"He is a Valley Terror, I suppose?"

"Yes, and the boss of them all. Pawnee Bill and I have been getting up a real affection for the gentleman."

"Then use him as a foil, letting the Valley Terrors know that you will kill him unless we are allowed to retreat unharmed."

"A good idea; but they don't know we have him, I suppose."

"Let him ride out and show himself, you holding the end of the lariat which is fast to his horse."

"Your plan is a good one, Frank, so work it out yourself," said Buffalo Bill.

Surgeon Powell at once stepped up to the prisoner, and said:

"My man, we have no idea of being sacrificed, if you can save us, so we will use you to make terms for us."

"How so, sir?"

"I will tie the two lariats together, and you ride your horse out the length of them."

"Yes, sir."

"Then hail your comrades, and tell them that if they will let us pass out with you, we will release you, once out, we get a good start."

"No, Powell, we can't do that, for he knows a secret that would cause the Woman in Black to be murdered by the devils if they knew it."

"Ah! then just tell them that if they attack us again that we will put you to death."

"Will they care?" asked the prisoner.

"I do not know, but you should."

"I have some good pards there who might stand up for me."

"Well, it is worth the trial," and the lariats were fastened together and tied to the horse.

Then the prisoner rode out boldly.

Before it was discovered who he was, he was fired

upon, the Valley Terrors thinking the scouts were riding out to make a dash for freedom.

The prisoner never flinched under the fire, though one of the bullets wounded him slightly on the shoulder.

"Ho, pards, do you wish to kill me?" he called out, in a voice that rung down the cañon.

A chorus of voices spoke his name:

"Iron Heart Dick!"

"Yes, I am your pard, Iron Heart, the pony rider, and I am in hard luck, for I am in the hands of the Philistines."

"We kin see thet, dead sure," said a voice.

"Well, pards, it rests with you whether I die or live, for there are four scouts here, and they swear to kill me if you attack them again, while if you draw off and give them a chance to get out of this trap and a good start, they will spare my life."

No reply was immediately returned, and it was certain that the Valley Terrors were considering the proposition.

The ex-pony rider, the same man who had so cleverly carried the forged letter that enabled Mexican Monte to kidnap Helen Quimby, was a general favorite with the outlaws.

They did not wish him to die; but they wanted the scouts taken.

Seeing that they were discussing the matter, Iron Heart Dick decided to help matters along, and as a proof that the men would keep their word, he called out:

"Pards, don't you fool yourselves with the belief that these men won't do as they say, for you have here at bay Buffalo Bill, Surgeon Frank Powell, the doctor scout, Pawnee Bill, and Texas Jack."

A yell greeted these words and the scouts at once saw that their prisoner had made a mistake.

"They'll be that more anxious to take us now," said Texas Jack.

"All right, pards, if they don't trade, when night comes, I'll climb the lariat, and take Jack's horse and go for help, for Captain Alfred Taylor and his brave troop are not camped so very far from here, but that by hard riding they can get here by sunrise, and the boys of the Fifth Cavalry know how to ride to rescue friends," said Buffalo Bill.

In the meantime, a voice called from down the cañon:

"Iron Heart, if we draw off, will they set you free?"

It was Mexican Monte who spoke.

"No, captain, they will not."

"Then we'll carry their position and rescue you," was the determined reply of Monte.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CHIEF.

Finding that there was to be no compromise, the prisoner called out:

"All right, captain, do as you deem best with no reference to me—good-by."

Then he turned and rode back in among the rocks.

"Well, you are a cool one, pard," said Texas Jack admiringly.

"May I ask if your chief is there?" said Buffalo Bill.

"He is not, sir."

"You called some one captain."

"Yes, our lieutenant, but we call him captain, as the chief holds the title of major."

"I see; but who is this lieutenant?"

"A Mexican, whose name is Monte, or, at least, we know him as Mexican Monte."

"Where is your chief?"

"I do not know."

"So your lieutenant is willing to see you die, it seems?"

"Yes; and I made a mistake in saying who you were, for they are now that more anxious to capture you."

"I suppose so, for all four of us have been your foes."

"Yes, rather."

"Well, they are welcome to open the ball whenever they see fit."

"I may as well tell you that not one of you will be spared."

"We do not expect to be, if taken."

"They will show no mercy, especially if Mexican Monte is in command."

"We ask none, and will fight them on their own terms," said Surgeon Powell firmly.

"Gentlemen, I hate to see brave men like you utterly wiped out."

"Thank you; but we are very much alive just now, and while there is life there is hope," said Cody.

"Yes; but Mexican Monte will never attack you until sure, and he has sent for more men, I am certain, and he can throw a large force against you."

"He'll think there is a large force here," Pawnee Bill muttered.

"I see your jacket is stained on the shoulder. You were wounded when they fired upon you, so let me dress the wound," said Frank Powell, in a kindly tone.

"Thank you, sir; but I don't think it amounts to much."

The surgeon, however, asked Buffalo Bill to unlock the irons upon his wrists, and throwing back the clothes of the prisoner revealed an ugly-looking flesh wound.

"It is not serious, but is a ragged-looking wound."

And so saying, he set to work and dressed it with the same care he would have shown toward one of his comrades.

The prisoner thanked him warmly, placed his hand again to have the irons locked on, and said earnestly:

"I really wish some compromise could be made, for I will be pained to see you four men slain."

"You really think that we have got to die, then?" Buffalo Bill asked.

"I can see no escape for you if Mexican Monte attacks you with nearly all the band."

"You think he will do this?"

"I am sure, for had he not sent to the camps for the rest of the men he would have attacked before this; but he will charge out suddenly upon you before very long, and woe be to all of you if they are not checked."

"That's what I think, pard; but there are four rifles here and eight revolvers, and some dead shots to draw trigger, if I do say so, while we have a bowie apiece, and being as you will only be a looker-on, just mention it outside so the boys will know how Buffalo Bill and his pards handed in their checks," said Pawnee Bill.

"Under other circumstances I might enjoy the fight, but just now I will not, for I hate to see you sacrificed. Besides, the position I occupy will not be perfectly healthy, with bullets flying about."

"I'll remove you further back among the rocks."

"No, Buffalo Bill, my pards risk life to rescue me, and you risk life to keep me, so I'll not skulk, but take chances with all of you. Hark!"

"What is it?"

"I heard a bugle note."

"Well?"

"Either Mexican Monte is calling the men to be ready for the charge, or——"

"Or what?"

"The chief has arrived."

"Major Iron Hand?"

"Yes."

"What then?"

"You may be able to make terms with him, for Mexican Monte will have to step back if the major—— No they are coming!"

As the prisoner uttered the words, the Valley Terrors rode into view in the cañon, two hundred yards away.

They were all mounted now, and riding eight abreast, with two lines behind the leaders.

"Twenty-four of them," said Buffalo Bill.

"Twenty-five, for there comes Mexican Monte to lead them."

"Oh, he has pluck!"

As the prisoner spoke, the scout, peering over the rocks, saw a man dash to the front of the body of outlaw horsemen.

He was splendidly mounted, dressed in Mexican costume, and held a revolver in each hand.

Certainly he was a dashing-looking leader.

Then the scouts counted the odds against them and felt that death was very near for all.

But as Mexican Monte wheeled in front of his horsemen and gave the order:

"Forward! Follow me!" the four rifles rang out and as many men dropped from their saddles.

That quartet of border heroes were not throwing away any shots, nor did they intend to waste lead.

On bounded the outlaw riders, but hardly had they gotten well under way when loud, ringing, clear, came the notes of a bugle.

It rang through the cañon in a hundred echoes, and each outlaw whose ears it reached, turned to the right-about, while suddenly into view dashed a horseman, the bugle to his lips that was waking the ringing call to retreat.

"I was right! it was the chief, for there he is," cried Iron Heart Dick, the prisoner, and the eyes of the four men at bay turned upon the outlaw leader.

There he sat now in his saddle, dressed in black, with cavalry boots, gold spurs, a black sombrero, and a mask upon his face.

His horse was also jet-black, and covered with foam as though hard ridden.

The chief had arrived, and his men stood in silence before him, while the four scouts stood gazing in wonder at the scene.

That the outlaw chief was in angry mood, even the scouts could see at that distance, while Iron Heart Dick said:

"Gentlemen, somebody is going to suffer in that crowd."

"Somebody has suffered," grimly said Pawnee Bill.

"I mean that it's the chief's turn now."

"Ah, he's on the warpath?"

"He certainly is."

"What about?"

"I don't know; but he has ridden his horse hard to get here, and that bugle note I heard a while ago he sounded some distance off to let them know he was coming."

"Well?"

"If the boys heard it, and Mexican Monte ordered a charge after hearing it, then he will get himself into trouble."

"You think so?"

"I know so, and bad as my position is, I believe I would rather be in it than in the shoes of Mexican Monte this minute."

"I don't see that he has done anything against the chief," said Buffalo Bill.

"Well, he has been holding a pretty hard rein of late, while the chief has been absent, and he did something a few nights ago which, though I helped him, I think will get him into trouble. I guess it has, for it is my opinion the chief went to the camps, heard you were in the Shadow Valley, and that Mexican Monte was after you, so he put out to overtake his men and have something to say. See, he is talking to Mexican Monte."

"Yes, and the Mexican is excited, the chief cool as an icicle," said Pawnee Bill.

All watched the scene, and suddenly saw the chief take out a white handkerchief from his pocket, wave it, and ride toward the scouts' position.

"Hello! is he going to surrender the whole gang?" asked Pawnee Bill.

"Something's up," responded the prisoner, who was most deeply interested in what was going on.

With utterly fearless mien the masked chief rode toward the scouts, simply letting his white handkerchief flutter in his hand.

"How easily I could pick him off," said Pawnee Bill, glancing along his rifle.

But he added:

"If that white flag did not protect him."

"He shows confidence in us," Buffalo Bill remarked.

"Which we cannot betray," Frank Powell added.

Until he was within sixty feet of the rocky barrier the chief rode, and there he halted.

The eyes of all were upon him, and it could now be seen that his superb black horse had been hard ridden.

"Men, I would like a word with you," he said, in a deep voice that rang with a tone of command.

"All right, sir, what have you to say?" Buffalo Bill responded.

"You have a prisoner in your midst?"

"Yes."

"It is one of my men, Iron Heart Dick by name."

"Yes, sir, we have the man."

"You offered to give him up a while ago?"

"On condition, yes."

"I wish now to offer you terms."

"I thought the chief wouldn't see me die," said Iron Heart Dick, the prisoner.

"What terms do you offer?"

"That you exchange your prisoner for one I offer in return."

"It's all the same to us," said Buffalo Bill, rather glad to give the brave Iron Heart a chance to escape.

"I will give you another prisoner, and allow you to ride out of the cañon unmolested, if you will at once take the trail for Fort Benning and surrender your prisoner into the hands of Colonel Royston."

"We'll do it."

"The prisoner I give you in exchange is my lieutenant, Mexican Monte, who had disobeyed my orders, though he knew the penalty was death. Will you take him and

go, your way unmolested, in exchange for the prisoner you now hold?"

"We will, and we'll vouch for it that Lieutenant Mexican Monte will be hanged before he is a week older."

"So be it," and turning toward his men, he called out: "Bring the prisoner here!"

Two men advanced with Mexican Monte, securely bound and tied to his horse, riding between them.

The Mexican was very white, and he had a haggard look that was painful to look upon.

Buffalo Bill at once rode out with the prisoner, and, halting near the chief, he unlocked the irons from the wrists of Iron Heart, who said promptly:

"Thank you, Colonel Cody, and good-by. I won't forget you all."

"Now, sir, here is your prisoner, and I expect you to carry out your threat and have him hanged."

"Colonel Royston will need no urging, sir, I assure you, to perform so good a work," Buffalo Bill responded.

"I will now draw off my men, sir, and you will be at liberty to ride out at your pleasure," and the chief turned and rode down the cañon with the released prisoner by his side and the outlaw guard following.

The Mexican had uttered no word, but his teeth were set and his face had turned to the hue of a corpse.

Placing himself by his side, Buffalo Bill saw that he was handcuffed, and also bound to his horse.

He took the bridle rein and led the prisoner back to where the others awaited him.

"Well, pard, you have made good terms; but did you not recognize the chief?"

"There cannot be two such men—he looked like Bandbox Bill, the Bravo in Broadcloth!"

"Curse him! he is Bandbox Bill," broke savagely from the lips of Mexican Monte.

CHAPTER X.

A GAME FOR LIFE.

It was some little time before the scouts were willing to ride out of the cañon, and then Texas Jack suggested that he should climb up the lariat to the ridge, reconnoiter, get his horse and Surgeon Powell's, and meet them in the valley, where they would take the trail for the fort.

This was agreed to, and Texas Jack took his departure.

He had been gone but half an hour when they saw him appear on the ridge below, and he called out:

"All serene! they have gone."

Then out rode the others with their prisoner, silent and haggard.

The discovery that the chief of the Valley Terrors was the Bravo in Broadcloth worried the scouts, for they had hoped for better things of their Hallelujah friend.

They had gained their lives upon a pledge to go to the fort and take the prisoner with them; but upon this plan they decided to hedge a little.

As soon as they met Texas Jack, with his own and Frank Powell's horse, the four held a consultation of war, and it was decided that they should go at once to the rendezvous where Jack Crawford was to guide Captain Alfred Taylor and his men, and tell that daring and dashing officer the exact situation.

"He will at once say 'Lead my troopers to the Valley Terrors' den, and then we can rescue Miss Helen,'" said Buffalo Bill.

"Rescue Helen Quimby, did you say?" asked the prisoner quickly.

"Yes; what do you know about her?"

"She is my cousin."

"Then she is more unfortunate than I thought," said Surgeon Powell. "Is she in the camp of the Valley Terrors?"

"She is."

"You know this?"

"I do, for I have been intending to rescue her myself, and to-night was set to do so."

"You intended to rescue her?"

"Yes; for I tell you the truth when I say that she is my cousin. She is the daughter of a Mexican lady who was my father's sister. But I fell from grace, and was driven to outlawry. Helen met a young man, an outlaw, whom she fell in love with and met clandestinely near the fort. So they arranged a plan for her to run off with him, which she did, and he brought her to the outlaw camp. His horse had fallen, however, and broke his leg, and the men had to carry him on a litter to the camp. She has cared for him most kindly, but all to no use, for he died last night, and I intended to take her back to the fort to-night, for the men were determined to hold her for a large ransom."

"She will return, then?" asked Buffalo Bill, who could see no reason for doubting the story.

"Yes. She promised me she would; but I cannot help her now, unless you are willing to trust me."

"Well, we will rescue her in a day or so."

"If you expect to find Major Iron Hand and his men anywhere near their present retreat after dawn to-morrow you will be badly deceived."

"They will go, then?"

"Certainly; and you know how hard it is to find the Valley Terrors."

"What could you do if we trusted you?" asked Pawnee Bill, who saw the truth of the prisoner's reasoning.

"I could slip into the camps, knowing every foot of land as I do, and get my cousin out, bringing her to you; but I would wish your pledge to set me free when I have done so, for I take big chances, as the chief would hang me if I was caught."

"It is worth the risk, pards, to rescue Miss Helen," said Pawnee Bill.

"So do I say, pards," Texas Jack added.

But Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell were doubtful about the prisoner.

They knew Helen well, and could not believe that she was one to run off with any man.

They thought that the Mexican told a most plausible story, however, and said as much, which made Pawnee Bill and Texas Jack urge the more to trust him.

At last Buffalo Bill said:

"How near to the camp of the Valley Terrors can you guide us after nightfall?"

"It would hardly be safe to venture nearer than a couple of miles."

"Well, we will halt that distance away, and I will go on with you on foot within easy hail of the camps, and await you there."

"All right, sir, and I will then slip into the camp and return with my cousin."

"This is the best we can do, I suppose, for, as he says, the Valley Terrors will be gone in the morning,

and we all know what it is to find them," Pawnee Bill said.

So it was decided that the prisoner should guide them as near the camps as was safe, and then go on with Buffalo Bill on foot.

Upon his return with Helen he was to be set free, and Pawnee Bill gave him this piece of advice:

"Then, pard, you had better levant for the sunny land of Mexico, for if we catch you again, you may not have a pretty cousin to save you from the rope."

So the scouts and their prisoner set off on the march, and just at nightfall the Mexican called a halt.

Then he was freed of his irons, and on foot with Buffalo Bill went toward the camp of the Valley Terrors.

After a walk of a couple of miles, the Mexican said:

"There is a sentinel put yonder, and you had best stop here, for I will have to work around him into the camps."

"I don't mind the risk of going with you."

"No, it is best for me to go alone, and if I am detained some time, do not be anxious, for I may have some difficulty, and then I wish to bring my cousin out upon horseback, if possible."

"Past the sentinel?"

"Coming from the camps he will not be suspicious, and I can get the advantage."

"All right, go ahead, pard; but somehow I do not trust you, and only take the chances hoping to free Miss Helen. If you fool me this time, beware of our next meeting."

"I will not deceive you, for I have too much at stake, as you know," and the Mexican glided away and disappeared in the darkness of the timber.

But once he had gotten fairly out of sight, he turned and looked back toward where he had left the scout, and, shaking his clenched fist, said, in a voice hoarse with passion:

"Yes, I have so much at stake, Buffalo Bill, that you will never see or hear of me again. I will go to the camp and Helen shall leave it with me, for Monte Miranda is not a man to be foiled in the plot of a lifetime."

CHAPTER XI.

OVERTAKEN

Buffalo Bill and the Mexican had not been gone half an hour before the sound of hoofs was heard by the three scouts hiding by the roadside.

It was twilight, and they saw the form of a horse and rider, but the latter was dismounted and seemed to be following their trail.

"Lost anything, pard?" said Pawnee Bill, covering him with his rifle.

Up above his head went the hands of the man and thus he stood in silence.

"Hello, it's an Injun, pards!" cried Pawnee Bill.

"Yes, me good Injun, Thundercloud."

"Well, you must have night eyes to follow our trail as you were doing."

"Where Big Chief Buffalo Bill?"

"Just now he is engaged on a little trip; but what do you want with him?"

"Have talking paper from chief."

"Ah! a letter? Produce it."

The Indian handed over a letter which he took from his headdress, and said:

"Go in timber and build fire so can see."

"We'll do it, and at the same time request the honor of your company, for I may not be up in Injun letters," and Pawnee Bill led the way.

A small fire was built in a secluded spot, and then Pawnee Bill looked at the letter.

It was addressed in a bold hand to "Buffalo Bill, On the Trail."

Opening it, for it was not sealed, Pawnee Bill handed it over to Surgeon Powell.

The following was the letter:

"FRIEND CODY: My faithful courier Thundercloud will hand you this on the trail, and I desire to offer an explanation and ask your aid.

"You knew me as Bandbox Bill, the Bravo in Broadcloth, and to-day recognized me as the chief of the Valley Terrors.

"In truth I am acting in the latter capacity, but for a purpose, and that is the utter annihilation of the band.

"I write hastily now to say that my lieutenant, Monte Miranda, boldly kidnaped his cousin, Helen Quimby, in my absence, and holds her a prisoner in his quarters in the camps, intending to make her his wife, for a purpose she may explain when you see her.

"For this I demanded the exchange of prisoners, hoping you would hang him as he deserves.

"I was informed of this by my sister, the Woman in Black, and she now has Miss Helen in her keeping, where she will be safe.

"I happen to know that Captain Alfred Taylor and forty of his men, with Jack Crawford as guide, Major Quimby, and several other officers are camped in the White Cliff Cañon forty miles from here, and if you will lead them to-morrow night against my camp, I will promise you that the outpost will be friendly to you, and the chaff, selected from the wheat, will be where you can surround and capture them.

"More I need not say other than to say that when you know me as I am you will find that I am not the candidate for the rope's end that you believe me.

"Yours, THE BRAVO IN BROADCLOTH.

"P. S.—Thundercloud will guide you to the post to-morrow night where you are to enter the camps of the Valley Terrors."

To express the surprise of the scouts upon reading this letter would be impossible.

They quickly decided that Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell were right in not wishing to trust Mexican Monte, and that if Buffalo Bill was awaiting his return, "he'll be gray before he gets there," Pawnee Bill said.

As Thundercloud said he could doubtless find the scout, Pawnee Bill went with him, and in an hour's time they returned with Buffalo Bill.

The latter read the letter carefully, and then started for the White Cliff Cañon.

They arrived at dawn, and the whole story was placed before Captain Taylor and Major Quimby, and the latter said:

"My friends, let me explain to you how my daughter is situated. My wife's father was a very rich man, but hated Americans with all his soul, so that he disinherited his daughter for marrying me. After her death, he made a will leaving his vast estate to Helen, on condition that she should marry her cousin, Monte Miranda, a wild, reckless young officer. He hoped thus to get her back to Mexico, and wipe out all idea of America from

her. I told Helen the situation as soon as she reached her teens, and she vowed never to go to Mexico, or to marry her cousin, preferring to lose the fortune. The young scamp sought her at boarding school, and, driven out of Mexico by his crimes, I suppose he came to the fort to see her when I was away. Then he became an outlaw and kidnaped her. Now you understand the situation, and to-morrow night my brave girl will be rescued from the spider's web spun about her young life."

Thus the truth became known, and by noon the gallant troopers were upon their way to the den of the Valley Terrors, for there was a deep mystery yet to be cleared up about the Bravo in Broadcloth.

CHAPTER XII.

IN MYSTERY STILL.

True to his promise, the Bravo's faithful redskin courier led the party to a position near the den of the Valley Terrors.

Then he gave a signal, which was at once responded to, and a horseman rode forward to meet them.

It was the Bravo, and he said, in his quiet way:

"Colonel Cody, I would like a word with you, your scout friends, and the commander of these troops, with any one else you may wish to have hear what I desire to make known."

"I will ask Major Quimby also, sir."

"Certainly; I was not aware that he was with you."

And the Bravo led the way to a spot some distance from the troopers, and said:

"Gentlemen, I am no outlaw seeking to make terms by an act of treachery toward my men. But I am supposed by these men to be a different person than who I really am. The truth is, I am a United States government detective, and I entered upon this work to hunt down one most dear to me. That one is my—my—sister, whom you know as the Woman in Black. I need only say that she married one whom she believed to be an honorable man, and her eyes were opened to the fact that he was a Mormon leader. He carried her to Salt Lake, and I vowed that she should be avenged and rescued from her cruel life. I sought, through certain influence I have, to get the appointment of a special government detective, and then I began my work. I found that the man who had so deceived my sister was secretly the chief of a band of outlaws. In truth he was known as Major Iron Hand, and chief of the Valley Terrors. We met, and he fell by my hand.

"This man bore a startling resemblance to myself in face, form, voice, and action, and taking advantage of it I played the bold game which will end the career of the Valley Terrors. I went to their camps, in which I had been in disguise, and made myself known to my sister. She, poor woman, at once said that she would aid me in my good work, and as the Woman in Black she did many a good act, saved many a life. But I had to play my cards well, and not to be suspected, I left the command of the band to Monte Miranda, with the Woman in Black to serve as a check upon him all she could. I picked out my men to spare, and made them detectives, and I had also a complete secret-service league under me in the mountains.

"I knew when you and Pawnee Bill left the fort, Cody, and also the disguise which Surgeon Powell and Texas

Jack assumed, and their mission. I sent the Woman in Black word of your movements, for I had men upon your trail. I need hardly say more, but that when I learned that Monte Miranda had kidnaped Miss Quimby, and the Woman in Black notified me, I came at once to the retreat. I found that outlaw scouts had discovered your presence in the valley, and the Mexican was determined to hunt you down. He was commanded not to do so by the Woman in Black, but refused to obey, and I arrived fortunately in time. I only regret that he escaped, for he slipped into the lines last night, found Miss Helen was gone, for the Woman in Black had taken her with her, and, taking his horse and other weapons, he made his escape.

"Now I will lead you into the den of the Valley Terrors, and the men who are outlaws are in one camp to-night, while my detectives are in another place. You can surround the Valley Terrors, and what you do with them is none of my business. Are you ready to move, Captain Taylor?"

"I am, sir," said the captain, who with the others had been an amazed and interested listener to the strange revelations of a man who even yet was a mystery to one and all of them.

The "chaff," as the Bravo had called the real outlaws of the gang, were very quickly surrounded by Captain Taylor and his men, and, after a sharp, short fight, in which a number fell, the remainder were captured and securely guarded.

The "wheat" were the detectives of the Bravo, and they were a bold lot of men; but not one of them knew anything about their chief's former life.

For reasons of his own, the Bravo had given Iron Heart Dick his freedom and told him to get out of the way as quickly as he possibly could.

Great was the joy of Helen and her father when they found themselves in each other's arms.

The Woman in Black still kept in the background, after bidding Helen farewell, and the next morning, when the Bravo took his departure for Hallelujah City, she accompanied him.

But before he took his leave, the Bravo had a talk with Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell, and told them that, to track the man who had wrecked his sister's life, he had himself turned Mormon, and, among the secret band of which he had been made captain, was Slim Jones, while Bully Joe belonged to another company.

The laws of these leagues gave the chief power of life and death over the men, and when they did a wrong he could command them to die by their own hands.

These two men had deserted the Danite leagues to which they belonged, and, as has been seen, were forced to death by the command of the Bravo.

And further, Bandbox Bill made known that Kate Fenwick and Lou Gray had also married Mormons, to find out too late their mistake, and that he had urged them to remain in Hallelujah City, make a fortune, and then return to their homes, hiding forever the sad secret of their lives.

This they had done, and he added:

"Soon they will leave the mines, and with money to live on, no one will suspect how terrible has been their past."

"And you?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"I have kept my incognito through all, for my sister's sake; but we have a home to go to, and we start to-

morrow, so that you will doubtless never again hear of Bandbox Bill, the Bravo in Broadcloth. Still, I will trust to your honor, and give you an address, Cody, you and Surgeon Powell, where a letter will reach me, and if you ever need my services as a border detective, write to me and I will come."

Some time after, when Buffalo Bill did have to call upon the Bravo for his aid, the scout discovered that he was a wealthy Texas ranchero, whose whole life had been a sad romance.

THE END.

"Buffalo Bill and the Ranchero King; or, Pawnee Bill on the Rio Grande," is the title of the story of a picturesque phase of Far West life which will appear in the next issue of this weekly. A lariat is thrown at a dramatic moment, upsetting evil plans and causing bitter enemies. The colonel and his daughter are attacked by Indians and a dashing Mexican army officer is wounded and nursed by the belle of the fort. A Mexican captain of lancers is openly charged with cowardice. A mysterious and chivalrous young ranch owner comes and goes at thrilling moments, always accomplishing good and punishing bad. The story is filled with incidents typical of border life in the days of incessant dangers from skulking enemies. It is No. 561, out February 10th.

Powell's Projectiles.

By Oscar Hatch Hawley.

(A TWO-PART STORY—PART I.)

CHAPTER I.

STRONG-ARM DIPLOMACY.

When Ensign Powell was ordered on shore duty at the port of Dahmo, he was the envy of all the other officers on the cruiser *Tallapoosa*. They knew that the assignment was coming, and each one had hoped to be selected, for life on shipboard got to be very monotonous during a long cruise, and the *Tallapoosa* was just back from a three months' voyage. But if Powell was glad the choice had fallen on him, he gave no demonstration of great and hilarious joy by way of showing his approval. Of course, he was happy in the thought that he would be able to stretch his legs for a few weeks, but about the rest of it he "didn't know."

Dahmo was the chief port of the Republic of Boroguaya—the city where all business with incoming and outgoing ships was transacted—and, as the foreign commerce was considerable, the collector of the port handled a great deal of money. Ensign Powell had been given the office of temporary collector of the port, not because the government of Boroguaya desired it, but because a great sister republic had concluded that such a course was necessary. The country was a hotbed of revolution and insurrection, changes of government took place overnight, and the president of to-day might be the refugee of to-morrow.

Every time a new government was proclaimed, all the debts of the old government were repudiated and the creditors were left to whistle for their money. But at last, in one of the general upheavals, Boroguaya overstepped herself. She repudiated a debt to one of the

chief moguls of the great sister republic, which caused immediate happenings not at all in line with tradition or sentiment. The great sister republic gave quick notice that the debt must be settled, and in the course of time Boroguaya replied that the settlement would be made at an early date. The great sister republic then asked for an explicit indication of the date when the debt would be paid, and Boroguaya replied that it would be when the robins nested again—or words to that effect.

The great sister republic took the matter seriously rather than humorously, and concluded that, as there were no robins to nest in Boroguaya, there would be no nesting time. This looked to the solons of the great sister republic like a clear indication that Boroguaya had no intention of settling the debt, and so it was decided to give the little mushroom republic a much-needed lesson in the true art of strong-arm diplomacy.

They had been quibbling over the matter for six months—which they now considered half a year too long—and so concluded to take quick action, collect the debt before Boroguaya could recover her breath, and then get away with the money while the Boroguyans were trying to figure out how it had happened.

In accordance with this resolve, full instructions had been given to Commander Crampton, of the *Tallapoosa*, and he had been sent out to make the collection.

Commander Crampton did not take the officers of the *Tallapoosa* entirely into his confidence with regard to the nature of the trip. He told them that it was a semi-diplomatic mission, and that one of them would have several weeks' duty on shore when the destination was reached. And that was the reason the commander had sent for Ensign Powell when the ship came to anchor in the very shallow and open harbor at Dahmo.

"Mr. Powell," said the commander, when the ensign appeared, "I have concluded to detail you for the shore duty. You don't mind, I suppose?"

"I feel highly honored, sir," responded the ensign.

"I'm glad of that. I feared you might not care for the duty, as it is liable to be rather unpleasant."

"What is the nature of the duty, sir?"

"The collection of some claims amounting to two hundred and eighty thousand dollars. It is a nasty business, and I don't half like it, but orders are orders, and we have nothing to do but carry them out."

"Collect by force of arms?" asked the astonished ensign.

"That is the very thing we must avoid. As a matter of fact, between you and me, Mr. Powell, I do not mind saying that our course is entirely irregular; we haven't a warrant for it either in international law or precedent, but we must bluff it through."

"How is it to be done?"

"We are going to seize the customhouse and pocket all the receipts until the amount of the claims has been collected. That will take a month, probably, and during that time we must commit no hostile act, such as would give them cause to complain to other powers that we were overstepping our authority. For that reason the seizure must be peaceful. You cannot carry arms with you, and you cannot have a guard of armed marines, for that would be such a glaring violation of international law that we would get ourselves in serious trouble. But the cruiser in the harbor will have the effect desired, I believe.

"Here is a letter to President Riotos, which you are to deliver as soon as you land. The letter is an ex-

ample of diplomatic English that should serve as a model in the schools and colleges, for, while it is couched in the most polished language, and contains no word that could possibly offend, every line is filled with dynamite, which cannot fail to be observed by the blindest mortal on earth. Listen to this:

"It is with a heart full of sympathy that the great sister republic learns of the many international troubles now hampering the work of your splendid administration, and it is such a clear case of inability on your part to do more than recommend the payment suggested that assistance will be given you. An officer of this government has been detailed for that purpose. He will act in civil capacity, taking charge of the customhouse, and administering the office with the vigor characteristic of his kind. The cruiser *Tallapoosa* will bring him to your port and will remain in the harbor until he has finished his duties, when it will fetch him away. In the meantime the *Tallapoosa* will probably have an influence for peace with your countrymen, as they will be less likely to riot and disorders when a warship is near."

"That is what you might call letting President Riotos down very easily. You understand that as soon as you have paid your respects to the president, you are to go to the customhouse and take up your residence there."

"Live there?"

"Certainly. You will find very comfortable quarters there, and it is absolutely necessary that you never leave the place until your work is finished."

"I see." Any hope Ensign Powell may have had that he was to live at a hotel vanished. He saw at once that the duty was to be nothing in the shape of a lark, and that his nose would be on the grindstone most of the time, which is the particular reason that he made no sign of great joy at having been chosen for the task.

"You see, the principal thing is to get the money," continued Commander Crampton. "You walk into the customhouse as if you owned the place, and you will not have any difficulty. At the same time, do not make enemies of the people. Treat them with courtesy, and be amiable all of the time, but don't let any of the cash get away from you."

"Will you send for the money taken every day?"

"No, I think it will be policy not to take any of it out of the customhouse until you have the whole amount on hand. There are good, strong safes in the customhouse, and if you leave it there, no one will know very much about what is going on. But if we begin to take it away every day or two, it will be sure to cause an uprising, and then we might not get any of it. As I said, we cannot use force. The *Tallapoosa* is only a bluff. We would not dare to open fire on the port unless the mob threatened your life, and I have serious doubts about the advisability of doing it, even in that case. I think if you get into any trouble, we will have to land marines with blank cartridges in their rifles. The noise would have as good an effect as the steel, and then we would not have any death claims to settle. I have often noticed that the report of a gun seemed to have a greater effect on these Latin-Americans than the sting of the bullet."

"When am I to begin my duty?" asked Powell.

"At once. Pack your bag, order out the launch, and get ashore as soon as possible."

"Very well, sir."

Ensign Powell touched his cap and was gone. It was

not a pleasant duty on which he had been detailed, there would be so much office work about it, and office work was a thing he particularly abhorred. Still, there were many unpleasant things one had to do in the line of duty, and so he could not find fault. He would make the best of it. Besides, it was bound to be rather interesting—this meeting with new people, this wielding of the velvet grip within the mailed fist.

"Yes, he believed that, after all, he might like it—unless there should be trouble. It was not at all likely that there would be trouble, but he would have felt far better, when he came to think of it, if he had been allowed to carry his side arms. Still, there was the *Tallapoosa*, and she would probably keep the populace from making any demonstration against him.

He resolved that he would acquit himself in a manner to reflect credit on the country which he represented; that he would make friends of the Boroguayans so that they would not feel greatly humiliated by his seizure of the customs.

And he also resolved not to trust any one in the whole republic. His experience with Latin-Americans was not great, but he thought from what he had read he knew their character. So, while he made friends with them, he would not trust them, and he would be ever on his guard against any possible treachery on the part of those with whom he came in contact.

CHAPTER II.

THE PLAN PLEASES PRESIDENT RIOTOS.

"Ah, I am so very glad to see you," said President Rios, in excellent English, after he had read the letter which Powell presented to him. "And I am also very glad to receive this letter, which relieves my mind of a great worry."

"That is good news, indeed," returned Powell. "Then I may hope for your friendly interest in my welfare?"

"Most assuredly," acquiesced the president heartily. "I hope your stay at the customhouse will be thoroughly enjoyable, and I will do my best to make the time pass pleasantly for you. You have my very best wishes in the undertaking in hand, and I feel sure you will bring the matter to a satisfactory conclusion—one that will cement the already strong bonds of friendship between Boroguaya and the great sister republic."

"And now, your excellency, having finished business at the palace, I will bid you good-by and take up my duties at the customhouse."

"By all means," assented the president. "Wait a moment and I will have you taken down to the house in my state conveyance."

Powell declined the carriage, saying that as he had been on shipboard so long, he preferred the walk, and then, taking leave of President Rios, set off in the direction of the customhouse.

"Truly, I am the most fortunate man living," exclaimed President Rios to his secretary of war, Ramon, a few minutes after Powell had taken his departure.

"Your excellency has ever been a favorite of the gods," said Ramon humbly. "What is the new manifestation of their favor?"

"The answer to my most earnest prayer. For many months I have been greatly troubled as to the future, but now all is clear to me. The great sister republic has been moved by a kind Providence to come to my assistance, and now the way is as clear as day."

"Pardon, your excellency, but I do not exactly see the point."

"Very simple, Ramon," replied the president testily. "You are aware of the fact that all of our living ex-presidents have their homes in gay Paris."

"Two of them are there, I believe."

"The number is significant of the perils of this high office. I greatly admire the wisdom of their course, and it is my purpose to profit by their example."

"You mean that you contemplate a European trip, with the possibility of taking up your residence abroad?" asked the astonished Ramon.

"Precisely. The disgruntled Morales is getting a strong following in the interior, and I fear it will not be long before we have another revolution on our hands."

"But we can crush that as we have several other uprisings which have threatened your peace of mind."

"We can, perhaps, but we will not. It is too trying on the nerves, and I greatly desire to get some enjoyment out of life, so I have long been considering ways and means of accomplishing the desired end. The treasury, as you well know, has been in a sad state of depletion since the beginning of my term in this exalted office. The public debt has grown beyond all bounds. The high rate of taxes has caused much groaning among the people. And so it is that I have not been able to get a sufficient amount of the needful on hand with which to bring off my coup. For one has need of money in Paris."

"And still, your excellency, if you will pardon the dense stupidity on the part of your humble servant, permit me to say that I am yet in the dark. I do not see how——"

"You were ever a fool, Ramon, with inability to see beyond the end of your nose—which is not of heroic proportions," interrupted President Rios.

"Yes, your excellency."

"But you are a good fellow, and I will enlighten you, for I have need of your services in bringing my plan to a successful conclusion. The great sister republic has installed an agent in the customhouse for the purpose of collecting certain claims held by citizens of that country. A very diplomatic letter has been sent to me in regard to it. It is a bluff, and no one knows that better than I, but I will let them think they are to have their own way."

"If we desired to throw the agent out we could do so, and they would be powerless to help it; for they dare not use force in the collection of this claim. So the agent is in the customhouse without a guard, without a weapon of any kind, and the only protection he has is the ship in the harbor, which is only more bluff, for it dare not fire on the port. But the bluff will be as useful to us as to them, for our peaceful citizens will see that we are powerless to help ourselves, that if we do not allow the agent to take the customs receipts, the ship will fire on the city and destroy it."

"Now, it will require about three or four weeks for the collection of sufficient money to meet the claims, and at the end of that time it will be transferred to the ship. But here is where our great plan must come in. We will cultivate the acquaintance of the agent, who seems to be a very youthful and trusting person, and so we will be able to know from time to time about how much money he has on hand."

"When he is about ready to leave the place, there will be an unfortunate uprising of the people. They will mob the customhouse and sack the building. Perhaps the agent

will be handled harshly. That will be too bad, for he seems to be such a very agreeable young man. When the mob has finished, you will see to it that the safes are emptied of their gold, and bring it here, where we will hide it.

"Then we will express deep regret to the great sister republic; will let them see how heartily we sympathize with them, and will make such promises of good intentions as will satisfy them of our inability to control the mob. Then there will be another revolution, and you and I will prevail upon the great sister republic to take us to a place of safety. We will escape while our brave soldiers are blocking the entrance to the city, and we will carry with us many things—including the gold, which you will rescue from the customhouse, and which the great sister republic is going to be so kind as to collect for us. Is it not very easy, Ramon?"

"But the ship," said the secretary of war—"will that not protect the customhouse?"

"Have I not already told you that they dare not fire on the port? It would disturb the peace of nations, and they are not anxious for any disturbance of that kind just at this time. They could do nothing more than land a few marines, but before that could be accomplished the work of the mob would have been done—if they are well primed for it."

"Master, your mind is without limit in its resources," said Ramon humbly. "When will it please your excellency to have the mob attack the customhouse?"

"Probably in about three weeks. Almost any time after two weeks have passed. It must be done at night, and the darker the night the better. If there should chance to be a storm, that would make an ideal night. But we will know when it is time to act. In the meantime, prepare a few trusty citizens as leaders for the mob."

"Your excellency, it is done."

President Rios stepped to the sideboard and deftly prepared his favorite beverage of "rhum," limes, cracked ice, and soda water. He sipped it slowly, with the air of a connoisseur, and when the glass was empty, rang for a servant. Writing rapidly on a little pad, he scribbled a note, which he handed to the servant, saying, at the same time:

"Take that to Señor Powell, at the customhouse, and tell him it is with the compliments of President Rios."

Ramon raised his eyebrows, by way of denoting his astonishment, and to show that he did not fully comprehend what the president had done.

"A little present to the new collector of the port," explained President Rios. "If he has a suspicion that we are not thoroughly in sympathy with him, this will help to allay his fears."

"And what was it?"

"An order for soda water, 'rhum,' and limes. We must teach him to imbibe our favorite beverage while he is with us. When once he has tasted the mixture, he will be our friend for life."

"Do not be too sure of that, your excellency; he may think the stuff is poisoned, and refuse to drink any of it."

"So he might. That is exactly what I should expect him to do. But when we visit him at the customhouse, and partake of his hospitality, we will show him that we are not afraid of our own beverages, which will make him ashamed of himself for having even suspected

us. Then he will be more apt to give us his confidence, and we will be better able to know the precise moment to strike."

"Master, you are truly a marvel of intellect. I can almost see the streets of gay Paris now."

CHAPTER III.

THE ATTACK ON THE CUSTOMHOUSE.

Life at the customhouse moved with humdrum monotony. Powell had found no difficulty in taking possession of the place, for the government official seemed thoroughly exhausted from his labors, and resigned books, papers, and all the paraphernalia of the office with a sigh of relief.

Powell found the house to be a long, low building, built around an open court, like most houses in the tropics. The front of the building faced a wide street, that skirted the whole water front, while the rear looked out over the wharfs. In front were the offices, and in the rear the living rooms, while on either side were sleeping apartments.

He had two servants from the ship, and these he posted on guard every night, as their day duties did not amount to a great deal. Every day or two he received a visit from some of the officers, and not infrequently President Rios or Secretary Ramon dropped in for a visit.

Powell had received the present from the president, and occasionally tried it—when Rios or Ramon were calling on him. But for himself he did not care for it, and the great case of soda-water siphons lay gathering cobwebs in the cellar.

The third week of his stay at the port had come and gone without an event to excite more than casual interest. He had collected nearly enough money to satisfy the claims, and was getting worried with the large amount on hand. Now he was more worried than usual, because President Rios, that amiable gentleman, had suggested that if Powell would say the word, he could have a guard of Boroguyan soldiers around the place. This was pretty good evidence that the president knew of the great amount of money on hand, and it worried Powell not a little to think that any one besides himself was giving a thought to the money.

He wished the president had not said anything about it. He wished the whole business was off his mind, and he again on shipboard doing a sailor's duty. To be sure, he had had no trouble thus far, but since the president had mentioned the matter of a guard, he felt that he was not safe at all, and that he was likely to be attacked at any time. The president had almost said as much, but he had refused the guard, for that would be not alone a sign of weakness, but an indication to the people that there was something valuable to guard in the customhouse.

And so, after thinking it over, he sent word to Commander Crampton, and asked that what money he had on hand be transferred to the ship. The commander replied that he would have it attended to the very next day, and that if there was any danger, to keep a strict watch all night. If a mob should attack the place in the night, a detail of marines would be landed from the ship, and so Powell need have no fear. If he could hold out half an hour or so, he would have assistance in plenty.

Powell did not have an idea that he was in danger, but he took greater precautions than ever in locking up that

night. Since he had been in the customhouse, he knew that the place was constantly watched from the ship. In the daytime the watch never took his eyes from the long, low building, and in the nighttime the ship's searchlight played on it constantly. It was impossible for a mob to attack the place without running in full view of the ship, and then it would be but a short time when the marines would land and come to the rescue.

All this looked very well in theory, and, under ordinary circumstances it might have worked out exactly as planned. But it is a well-known fact that between theory and practice there is a long step, and one that occasionally upsets "the best-laid plans of mice and men." So it was in this case. The elements had not been taken into consideration, and neither Commander Crampton nor Powell was prepared for the storm which broke over the city in all its tropical fury shortly after nine o'clock.

The rain came down in torrents, the wind shrieked around the house with the force of a mighty gale, the one-story structure shook and rocked as if on the billows of the ocean. When Powell thought of the ocean he remembered the ship, and realized at once that she could not weather the storm in that open harbor. She would drag her anchor and soon be fast on the rocks, or else she would drift on one of the numerous reefs near the harbor entrance.

He was not taken by surprise, therefore, when the searchlight suddenly left the building, and the next moment was blotted from view. The *Tallapoosa* was steaming for the open ocean, where she could ride out the storm.

There would be no sleep for him that night. He must be awake and on his guard. Perhaps there was no danger, but it was just the night for an attack. With the ship gone from the harbor, he would be unprotected, and, if left alone, the house would not stand before a determined mob any great length of time.

It was not probable that he would have to fight for his life—but supposing he did have to? What weapons did he have with which to defend himself? Nothing, absolutely nothing. Not a weapon of any kind in the house, unless, perchance, he could call those heavy iron bars in the cellar weapons.

He sat thus and thought for hours, he did not know how long, but he was suddenly startled to hear the wind give a last, long sigh, and die away, while the rain ceased almost as quickly as it had come. He went to the window and looked out. The moon was shining brightly high in the heavens, the streets were deserted, the city was asleep. His fears had been groundless, and his heart gave a great throb of joy as he realized that all was well.

He was about to turn away from the window, when he thought he saw the crouching figure of a man in the deep shadow of the nearest building. That was possibly a hundred yards away, across the wide street at the water front, and in one of the lateral streets running away from the wharfs. He looked again, and for a moment could make out nothing, then he saw a man running across the street, followed by another, and another, until the shadow was filled with moving figures.

Could it be that a mob, taking advantage of the storm and the absence of the ship, was preparing to descend on the customhouse? It seemed likely, but he wanted to know for sure, and he concluded to run across and see for himself what was going on.

But even as he thought of that he realized that it would not be safe to leave the customhouse. But, at least, he could step outside where he could get a better view.

He unbarred the door, and, leaving it open, stepped out into the bright light. Almost instantly he heard the crack of a rifle, and the next instant the sharp ping of a bullet as it cut the air close to his head. Then he jumped back into the house, knowing that his worst fears were realized.

He had no more than closed and barred the door, when a howling mob left the shadow and began thronging across the square. Their savage yells, punctuated with rifle shots, gave him an indication of their mood, and he knew that within a few minutes the door would be battered in and he taken prisoner, if not killed, while the safe would be emptied of its contents.

Now was the time he needed a few of the country's soldiers, and he wondered where they might all be, when such a disturbance was taking place. How foolish of him not to have allowed the president to station a guard about the place. One had been needed for a long time, but his pride had kept him from making the request.

But he had no time to think of errors now. If he was to do anything at all in defense of the place, he must get to work. Perhaps, after all, the situation was not so desperate. He might be able to stand off the mob with an iron bar for an hour, and by that time the ship ought to be in the harbor.

He had seen several heavy iron bars in the cellar. He would fetch one, and, with that, stand by the door when the mob began hammering it down.

Hurriedly he lit a candle, and, shielding it with his hand, ran down the stairs into the cellar. As he did so, in his excitement he failed to see where he was going and, stumbling over a box, fell sprawling on the floor. The candle dropped from his hand as he fell, and, groping for it, he again came in contact with the box over which he had fallen.

"Great guns and small pistols!" he ejaculated, passing his hands over the box and feeling its contents. "Why didn't I think of it before? They may find some difficulty in storming the place, after all."

TO BE CONCLUDED.

SOUND-OF-MANY-GUNS.

By Bertrand W. Sinclair.

O'Connor, the artist, painter of Indian pictures, lolled in his saddle and regarded the immaculate figure of the Honorable Owen Hildebrand Perry with half-amused impatience. The Honorable O. H. P. might have been transferred by some occult means from an English bridle path to the wind-blown stretches of the Blackfoot Reservation, on Bow River, if one judged by his garb. From his carefully adjusted monocle to the pancake saddle on his bang-tailed pony he conformed to the British mode. But the Honorable Perry was Canadian to the backbone, for all that, and he was likewise Indian agent in charge of the Blackfeet; and he spoke to O'Connor of Indian and Indian ways with the voice of authority.

"Not at all, not at all, my dear fellow," he said. "It's really a very simple matter. Common sense, and a show of firmness now and then; that's the best method."

"Then you think that one generation of schools and manual training and being herded within certain limits

will change the whole current of the red brother's nature?" O'Connor mildly inquired. "How many centuries do you suppose the Blackfeet have lived for war and buffalo running? And you're going to make farmers of them in one decade! Don't you take heredity into account?"

"Oh, pshaw!" the agent countered airily. "Heredity doesn't begin to weigh in the balance against environment. The human race is the most adaptable thing on earth. The buffalo are gone, the tribal wars are a thing of the past, and the Indian will naturally adjust himself to conditions as he finds them. Take Eddie Many Guns, for instance. Can you imagine him in a breechclout and war paint? Why, he is no more a savage than you or I. Yet his father, I have been told, was a noted scalp taker. That shows what education and environment will accomplish."

O'Connor shrugged his shoulders, and dropped the subject. The Honorable Perry was newly appointed to care for the dark-skinned wards of the Canadian government, and his experience with Indians had previously been confined to reading agency reports as an attaché of the Indian department. Yet he was positive that he knew Indians better than they knew themselves; he bristled with mental and physical metamorphosis theories as a porcupine with quills. If O'Connor had been minded, he could have told him much that would have been well for an unsophisticated Indian agent to know, for O'Connor had spent many years among the people of the smoke-blackened lodges—Crows, Crees, Sioux, Gros Ventres, and Blackfeet. O'Connor spoke their language as he did his own mother tongue, and he knew the heart of an Indian as well as it is given any white man to know. But to the Honorable Perry he was simply an agreeable, itinerant picture maker, albeit a surpassing clever one; and O'Connor shrugged his shoulders, knowing that in time the most obtuse of agents would acquire wisdom from his wards, though the manner of its acquisition might be none too agreeable.

O'Connor smiled to himself when his eyes rested for a moment on Eddie Many Guns. That the agent had grounds for his assertion no one beholding Eddie could deny. Straw hat, tan shoes, a neatly cut serge suit, and beautifully laundered linen decked Eddie's person, and O'Connor had already learned that he was a graduate of the Industrial School at Regina, where Indian students are made acquainted with Greek and Latin, and the arts and sciences, in conjunction with some useful trade—in fact, Eddie had shown O'Connor his certificate, which was equivalent to a B. A. from any college in Canada. The idea of associating war paint and scalping forays with Eddie was incongruous. Eddie was a very mild-spoken young man, rather proud of his accomplishments; and he was a representative specimen of several score of the younger generation of his tribe. O'Connor, out of curiosity, had been at some pains to cultivate his acquaintance; though, as a rule, the civilized Indian didn't appeal to him from either a picturesque or human-interest standpoint. And he had gathered that "Eddie" was a superfluity tagged on by the school—his tribal cognomen was "Sound-of-many-guns."

It was Dominion Day on the reservation, which meant horse racing, Indian dances—which the Honorable Perry frowned upon as a relic of savagery, and confided to O'Connor that he would forbid thereafter—and general hilarity. The Honorable Perry frownd much to frown

upon before the end of that day. O'Connor sat with him upon a hillside and watched the shifting crowd, gay in beaded and quill-worked buckskin and gaudy blankets. They had gathered from the four corners of the reservation for the three days' frolic, and the bucks sported the best of their wardrobe and the pick of their ponies. Crowfoot agency is the abiding place of two thousand of the Blackfeet, and they were all there.

Throughout the afternoon the agent and O'Connor rode from place to place, threading their way in a weaving mass of color that made O'Connor's fingers itch for a brush. Horse races here, a foot race there; yonder a barbecue, where four-year-old steers were roasted whole; a little farther, slim, supple young bucks, stripped to a breechclout, wrestled for a prize, and the plaudits of their partisans, till the sweat stood in beads on the bronze bodies.

At six o'clock the Honorable Perry bethought him of dinner, but O'Connor was loath to ride three miles to the agency and back again, for the big dance of the celebration was to begin at sundown. So the agent, with perfunctory regrets, rode away and left him. O'Connor was nowise mealy-mouthed, and barbecued beef was to be had in abundance for the taking.

O'Connor got him a piece of beef, and, with a tin cupful of tea to wash it down, squatted in the grass beside the lodge of Snarling Dog to eat it; and when he had finished he and Snarling Dog indulged in a friendly pipe and the luxury of mutual silence. A little way off, a knot of young Indians were gathered about an older one, who sat upon a blanket and spoke to them, orally and with sign talk.

"Who is the man of many words?" O'Connor finally broke into Snarling Dog's reverie.

A slight grin wrinkled the old Indian's mouth. "It is Running Horses, The Boaster," he replied. "A Cree. His tongue is like a river in flood time. He loves to tell the young men of the scalps he took in the buffalo days."

O'Connor rose and walked over to the group. A straw hat and high white collar denoted the presence of Eddie Many Guns in the listening circle, and O'Connor edged around till he was near Eddie before he found a place where he could see and hear. The Boaster was living up to his nickname. Also, from the thickness of his speech and the unnatural brightness of his deep-set eyes, O'Connor guessed that he had made connections with some "boot-legger's" stock of forbidden fire water. Otherwise no such wily old warrior as Running Horses would have been foolish enough to boast of lifting Blackfeet hair while he was a guest of the Blackfeet tribe.

"The glory of the old days is forgotten, since the white man overruns the prairie, and the war trails are blotted out by his feet," The Boaster was saying. "But there be old men among the Blackfeet who remember the last time the Crees and Piegiens fought. Three Wolves, of your people, led a party of warriors against us at our camp by Old Wives Lake. They struck us hard, and left our lodges burning, and took away many scalps."

"I, Running Horses, was first to strike the war post. Soon many braves were with me. Our medicine was strong, and we followed their trail for many days, till they came at last to their own camp—thirty lodges at Seven Persons Spring. There, while they feasted, and danced the scalps they had taken from the Crees, we came down on them like the whirlwind that licks up the

dust in the dry time. It was a great fight! Many of our best warriors gave their last war whoop at Seven Persons Spring. At the last we cornered the chief and a few others, who could not get away, and I, Running Horses, fought Three Wolves hand to hand, and killed him with my knife. We would have taken many squaws and much plunder, but another party of Blackfeet, camped a little way beyond, heard the noise of the fight, and came galloping on their war ponies—a great many of them. So we took the scalps and all the ponies of Three Wolves and his braves and came away. It was a great fight! We are friends now; though we have had many great battles. Is it not so? But I have kept the scalp lock of Three Wolves, because he was a great warrior, as I am. Behold!”

The Boaster rose to his feet, thrust a hand into the folds of his blanket, and drew forth the gruesome relic—a bushy, black lock of hair, with its two-inch circle of scalp strung taut in a little willow hoop. He held it up vainly, as proof of his prowess in battle.

There was a slight stir close by O'Connor, and Eddie Many Guns stepped close to The Boaster, snatched the scalp from his hand, and spat deliberately in his face.

“Loud-mouthed dog of a Cree,” Eddie said, in the throaty tongue of his tribe, “get to the lodges of your people, and bid them strike their tepee poles. No warrior boasts, at a peace feast, of the scalps he has taken from the givers of the feast. The Cree is a coward—an old woman. He has the mouth of a buffalo bull, and the heart of a prairie chicken! See! I spit in his face again.”

The Boaster stared an instant, wiping his face with the back of one hand. Then he drew his blanket close around him and stalked away. Many Guns looked after him, and laughed deep in his throat; then he, too, turned away in the midst of a group of young men, looking down at the scalp in his hand.

O'Connor watched the retreating form of The Boaster till a little cluster of lodges hid him from sight. Then he went back to his horse and asked Snarling Dog where sat the tepees of the visiting Crees. The old Indian pointed out the place, and O'Connor rode up on a rise where he could see. As he looked, the squaws stripped off the tepee covers, yanked down the slim poles, and loaded the travois with their belongings. In half an hour the ten lodges of the Crees were packed and under way, pulling toward the Blackfeet agency. O'Connor watched them string down the trail and pitch their camp again in the very shadow of the agency walls. Then he lit his pipe and went thoughtfully back to look on at the big dance.

Late that evening, when night had shut down thickly and the yellow tongues of many camp fires pierced the dark, O'Connor stood watching the Blackfeet disport themselves in the firelight. It struck him of a sudden that the crowd about the dancing place had thinned unaccountably. He turned his back on the half-naked figures that leaped and pirouetted in the firelit circle, and sought for the cause.

By ones and twos, in little bunches of eight and ten, the Blackfeet were breaking away from the outer edges of the throng, and slipping quietly through the night toward a hollow on the farther side of the great camp; a hollow from whence, as O'Connor neared it, came the steady beat of tomtoms and a yelling declamation, sounds that made O'Connor's blood jump faster—he knew their import. He went a little farther, and stopped to listen.

The shrill, half-chanted words floated up out of the hollow:

Hear my voice, ye birds that follow the war trails;
I go to prepare a feast for you to batten on;
I see you cross the enemy's lines;
Like you, I shall go.
I wish the swiftness of your wings;
I wish the vengeance of your claws.
I muster my friends—follow me, follow me.
Much blood will be spilt; scalps will be taken.
Ho! Ho! ye young men that are warriors,
Look with joy on the battle field.

While he stood there, hesitating, nerves atingle, a hand was laid gently on his arm, and the voice of Snarling Dog spoke in his ear.

“Turn, O maker of pictures,” he said to O'Connor. “Let us go back to my lodge.” It was a command as much as an invitation, and O'Connor turned back with him.

They threaded their way to the old Indian's tepee, and sat there a few minutes over a pipe. Snarling Dog vouchsafed no information, and O'Connor asked no questions, though he thought—well, many things. In a little while he bade Snarling Dog good night, and rode away to the agency, for he was tired and sleepy. As he mounted, Snarling Dog laid hand on the mane of his horse.

“The picture maker is wise—he knows the heart of the Indian,” he said softly. “If he hears a noise in the night, let him not be afraid. It is but the foolishness of the young men.”

Some time in the little hours that precede the summer dawn, O'Connor awakened to the popping of guns and a chorus of savage whooping. He sprang from his bed and peered out of a window that faced toward where the Crees had pitched their camp that evening. Red flashes spat angrily in the dark, and the crack of a rifle followed every flash. That was all O'Connor could see and hear for a minute; just the shooting and the yells and the red flashes in the dark.

Away on the opposite side of the agency a bugle shrilled in the night, clear and sweet above the noise about the Cree lodges. By the time O'Connor slipped on his trousers and got outside, a squad of mounted police thundered by. Before they reached the camp the shooting had died away. A few vague forms hovered about the lodges, inside of which the squaws hugged the ground and howled lamentation; and when the heavy-footed cavalry horses swung round a corner on the jump, the flitting, stooping shapes broke for their ponies, with the Blackfeet war cry. And pursuers and pursued vanished from O'Connor's sight and hearing with a rush of hoofs and a fresh burst of gun fire.

From here and there about the agency men came running—even the honorable Perry, in silk pajamas and bearing a shotgun—and joined O'Connor. With lanterns and candles they went from lodge to lodge. In each the raiders had left their grim handiwork; of forty Crees that pulled to the agency walls at dusk, no more than a dozen would see the sun rise again. Three Wolves, The Boaster, his squaw, and two sons lay half in, half out their lodge, and the bare, raw circle on top of each head shone ghastly red in the flickering lantern light.

Thereafter, scattering shots sounded faintly at intervals to the north of the agency. South, where lay the main Blackfeet camp, not a glint of fire showed till daylight shot the sky with rose and yellow, and then the blue smoke spirals went trailing lazily up from around many

breakfast pots. Then O'Connor and the agent, watching silently with field glasses from an upstairs window, saw the police shooting from the shelter of rocks and buffalo wallows at a patch of brush that crowned a tiny butte; and from the butte crest came answering white puffs for every shot the police fired.

"They've got some of them corralled on that hill," O'Connor said. "Let us ride over and see what's going on." And the Honorable Perry, inclined to wonder if he were really awake and not dreaming that some of his charges had actually gone "bad," followed O'Connor to the stable.

A mile from the agency Sergeant Wells, hatless, a bloody streak on one side of his face, and his left hand bandaged in a handkerchief, met them in the fork of a coulee.

"Better not get too close to that bunch," he warned. "We've lost three men already trying to come to hand-holds with them. Damn an Indian, anyway!" The sergeant stuck the spurs in his horse and was gone again before O'Connor could ask him a single question.

The cause of his haste became apparent before they got within speaking distance of the police, who were bombarding perfunctorily the brush patch from the shelter of the surrounding hills. O'Connor looked back and snorted. The sergeant had impressed a gun crew of agency clerks, and was bringing up the artillery—a four-inch field gun, relic of the Riel Rebellion. O'Connor and the agent, out of rifle range of that clump of berry bushes, waited and watched breathlessly the passing of Sergeant Wells, the horses on a gallop, the four-inch gun swaying and creaking on its rusty limber. Wells halted it on a hilltop, cut the horses loose, and brought the black muzzle to bear on the butte.

The first shell flew high, droned over the scrub like a giant bee, and burst in mid-air two hundred yards beyond. The second fell short, and sent up a miniature geyser of dirt and gravel. But the third—that time the sergeant got his sights alined and the elevation just right before he let her go, and the shell dropped fair in the midst of the thicket.

With the bang of the shell's explosion, three—just three!—Blackfeet bucks, stripped to a loincloth and an eagle feather in their braided scalp locks, burst from shelter and flung themselves, in a wild charge, against the mounted police. It made O'Connor's breath come faster and his hands clench into hard-knuckled fists to see them gallop straight against the barking Winchesters, the red-hand war sign painted large on the hips of the ponies and the Piegan war whoop in their mouths. For a moment it seemed as if they would cross the open space safely and lock horns with the bowlder-protected police; but the men behind the carbines got the range, and one after another the three Indians dropped. The last down fell within fifty yards of two troopers crouched behind a rock. His horse fell first, and the brave alighted on his feet, running, but a dozen rifles spoke together, and he crumpled, without a sound.

Sergeant Wells, as a matter of caution, dropped three more shells among the berry bushes on that butte. Then his men arose from bowlder and buffalo wallow, and came down to look at the dead. O'Connor spurred down to them hastily, for he had a theory, and he was anxious to know if it was correct. As it happened, he came first to the brave who had fallen first. The Honorable Owen Hildebrand Perry, right behind him, looked down, and

went ghastly white. For the body, slim, bronze in the slanting rays of the morning sun, and the face smeared and daubed with the red-and-yellow war paint, was that of Edmund Sound-of-many-guns, lately graduated from a white man's school. And, tied fast in the forelock of his dead war pony, fluttering lightly in the morning wind, was the fresh-taken scalp of Running Horses, The Boaster.

"There's five dead uns in the brush, sir," a trooper reported. "I don't think a bloomin' one of the bunch got away."

O'Connor turned his horse and rode away. He wasn't in a mood just then to discuss the relative merits of environment and heredity with any one, and least of all the Honorable O. H. P. He passed through the agency, and went straight to the Blackfeet camp, and dismounted at the lodge of Snarling Dog. Him O'Connor led a little way from the lodge door, and told, in few words, what he had seen. Then he asked Snarling Dog for the answer to the riddle.

The old man puffed solemnly at his little stone pipe, took it from his mouth, and tapped out the ashes in his hand.

"It is an ill thing, O maker of pictures," he muttered sententiously, "to boast to a son of lifting his father's scalp."

The Keeper of the Keys.

By W. BEALL BALDWIN.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAN THEY DIDN'T KNOW.

The conductor, slouching listlessly through the car, became aware that Rand was sleeping. He stopped in front of the young man's section and regarded him abstractedly with weary, kindly eyes that were lined about with deep, dusty wrinkles.

"I jes' naturally hates to disturb him," he remarked softly to himself alone; "but——"

He glanced at his watch. "Haff'n hour," he observed, and sat himself down familiarly on the arm of the seat.

Rand roused with the man's voice in his ears. "Hello!" he said drowsily. "What's that?"

The conductor repeated his question: "Y'u want t' git off at Hydrant, stranger?"

"Eh-yah!" yawned Rand, knuckling his eyes and stretching himself luxuriously. "Yes, I do," he announced, with more firmness in his tone.

"Dern' lucky I remembered ye. Hydrant's nothin' but a flag station. This hyah train don't stop there, less'n it's flagged, or to let off a passenger. Better git ready, m' friend."

"Thank you," said Rand. The conductor produced a plug of tobacco, seemed about to speak, changed his mind, bit off a mouthful, and moved on, his jaws working ruminatively.

Rand looked out of the window, sighing. The desert still unrolled its haze-veiled distances with insistent monotony. Its sands streaked past as if to them there was no end. Rand remembered that, in the early morning, they had been gray and cool-looking; now they were a blazing yellow, their vast expanses broken only by orderly arranged growths of cactus and greasewood; or, per-

haps, by a distant outcropping of rock, its outline jagged and all a-quiver in the dancing heat.

In his turn, the young man consulted his watch. "Half past two," he said, aloud. "That gives me half an hour wherein to array my person in purple and fine linen."

He rummaged about in the interior of a battered suit case, fairly plastered with labels, and found his collars; with one of which and a soap case he made his way, swaying to the rocking of the train, up to the lavatory. Here he swabbed the alkali dust from his face and neck and hands with lukewarm water; and presently it was a very immaculate young man, considering the hardships of a journey across the Mohave Desert, who was waiting for his train to slow down and let him off at Hydrant.

The minutes lagged on as though time itself had become enervated by the unrelenting fervor of the sun. Rand caught himself nodding, and discovered himself in a state of mind strangely apathetic. It was as though he were waking from a dream that he found himself, with a sensation of abruptness, standing on a rude board platform, his trunks at his side and the desolate world wide before him.

But as the Southwestern Limited, flaunting a plumelike tail of dust, raked and pounded away into the glaring West, until at length it became a mere, vibrating blur in the distance, Rand saw that he was not utterly alone.

Hydrant, he concluded, was a grim, desert jest. It was nothing more nor less than a rickety stage of sun-warped planks, set down with apparent aimlessness in the midst of a howling wilderness of sand and cactus and greasewood and prickly pear. On the one hand some misguided railway expert had caused to be set up a water tank; there being no water within a radius of many miles, it reared its gaunt, hideous head in piteous appeal to a sky of brass—a mockery as hollow as the nomenclature of the place.

But, on the other hand, there lay some few hundred feet of siding, whereon were several freight cars. A wagon drawn by a team of disconsolate mules, and loaded with oblong boxes, stood by one open door. Three men had been transferring the boxes to the car, but at the unexpected advent of this stranger—this astonishingly speckless apparition from the effete East—they had paused to give to Rand their undivided attention.

Rand looked away from them, a ghost of a frown gathering between his level brows. His eyes sought the Southern horizon—a line of white light—beneath which, he knew, lay Nampa and the ranches in the green of their growing lemon trees. From his feet, almost, a gray and dusty road stretched due south, straight as a ribbon laid across the desert growth. That was to be his road, Rand knew; but he had not counted upon finding such a total lack of accommodation at Hydrant; he had expected that some mode of transportation would be forthcoming upon demand. Otherwise, he would have telegraphed.

Rand's frown deepened. Was he to be forced to abandon his cherished project, his scheme of a surprise?

One of the men on the wagon sat himself down and began to swing his legs nonchalantly over the side. He considered Rand deliberately, and finally yelled at him:

"Hi, there, stranger!"

Rand took his gaze from the dusty road with its border of telegraph poles, and nodded to the man. At the same time his face brightened. For he had overlooked the cayuse which was languishing near the furthestmost of

the freight cars—a depressed animal whose ears dropped in keeping with the reins which had been carelessly thrown over its head.

"Hello!" said Rand pleasantly. He stepped down from the platform, plunging ankle deep in powdery dust, through which he plowed over to the wagon. "Where's Nampa?" he asked, smiling broadly.

"Y'u want to go there?"

"I did," Rand confessed.

The speaker jerked his thumb vaguely to the southward. "Thar's the road, stranger," he told Rand. "Jes' step along lively, and ye'll git thar about sundown. It's about fifteen miles."

His companions laughed joyously, and Rand joined them. "I want to find a man named Wheelock," he suggested. "Any of you know him?"

This gained him their sober interest.

"Wheelock?" repeated he who had first spoken. "Know Wheelock? Y'u mean the manager of Rand's ranch? Seems to me we're some acquainted with him. We works under him."

"That so?" said Rand. "Then, I presume, these are Rand's lemons?" He nodded toward the oblong, wooden boxes.

"Y'u presoom correct, stranger. If y'u want t' wait 'round till we're quit of this job, I calculate we c'n drive y'u over."

"Well," Rand suggested, "I'm in something of a hurry, and I was wondering if I could hire your cayuse. I'll pay you five dollars——"

But it developed that he was addressing the owner of the animal, who told him, with exceeding affability and a wave of his hand: "Take him right along, stranger, and it won't cost y'u nothin', neither. I'd jes' as leave drive back, m'self."

"Thank you," Rand said. "And—would it be too much to ask you to carry my baggage over to the ranch?"

"Cert'nly not, stranger. Proud to accommodate y'u."

"I'm greatly obliged to you." Rand strolled over to the cayuse, caught the bridle, threw it over the animal's neck, and mounted with a careless ease that won the owner's admiration.

"He kin ride," announced the man to his comrades.

Rand reined in by the wagon's side. "Follow the road, I suppose?"

"Straight ez a string, stranger. Y'u come to Nampa, 'n' anybody'll tell y'u whar Rand's ranch is. S'long."

"So long."

"I say—stranger!"

Rand turned in his saddle.

"Mought I ask yer name?"

"Certainly." The young man smiled; they couldn't head him off now. "I'm Rand," he explained, and struck the road at a rapid lope.

The men whom he had left gasped with amazement, the owner of the cayuse exhibiting particular affliction. "I'm damned!" he complained; and then, more cheerfully: "Damned ef I'd want t' be in Wheelock's shoes this night!"

CHAPTER II.

BY THE ROADSIDE.

A similar thought may have been in Rand's mind. As he rode on, more sedately when once he had left the siding a few hundred yards in the rear, a grimly satisfied look showed upon his face—a smile of sinister sweetness.

Dropping the reins upon the neck of the cayuse, he permitted the animal to make its own pace; the heat, indeed, was so oppressively intense as to preclude any idea of rapid motion. For Rand's part, he was content to pull down over his brows the rakish Panama he affected, and ride on with bowed head, his eyes half closed, deep in a profound pondering of the imminent.

With his hands crossed idly upon the pommel, he slouched in the saddle; a long-limbed, well-knit figure of a man, impressive with its suggestion of intense, well-conserved, latent force. The bed-rock truth upon which his character was builded was apparent almost to the casual glance—in the serious businesses of life Rand wasted no energy; he waited patiently, holding his temper, striking only when the time came, and then striking but once.

His eyes were gray and keen and clear—the eyes of a man who has accustomed himself to the wide, free skies of the open spaces. His face was deep-bronzed and clean of line. One looked into it and straightway understood that the exceeding nicety of Rand's attire was an idiosyncrasy, not a weakness.

In time he became aware that Hydrant lay in a cup-shaped hollow in the plain; or, rather, in a saucerlike depression, up to one rim of which the pony was gradually carrying him. Slowly the distant peaks rose, rugged and white with eternal snows, against the brilliant yellow of the sky to the south and west.

Presently he topped the rise and commenced an infinitely gradual descent into the Nampa Valley. And now, though still the mesquite and the yucca and the gray sage brushed his horse's flanks, and though still the dreadful silence of the desert dinned into his ears its soundless, inarticulate menace, Rand could see afar the wilderness blossoming as a rose.

The community of Nampa was spreading out its treasures beneath his gaze. Rand surveyed its formal arrangement, as though a checkerboard had been opened before him—its vast orchards, wherein the trees were set out with a geometrical exactness, its bordering fields of alfalfa, its garden plots—all green with the healthy, wholesome green of nature, and all wrested from the greedy clutch of the desert by main strength.

Even at the distance, so clear and still was the evening air, the man could see the gigantic water pipe which, running down from the Nampa reservoir in the heart of the looming San Bernardino range, had made possible by irrigation this miracle of fertility in a place of barrenness.

Rand nodded his head amiably, in evident satisfaction at the sight, and clucked to the cayuse, whose wilted spirits, now reviving at the prospect of forage and water and a night's rest, caused it to get onward with expedition.

The purple shadows of the hills stole across the landscape, shrouding alike in clear obscurity the desert and the cultivated lands. Rand rode on and passed into the heart of it. A barely perceptible coolness became apparent in the atmosphere. Beyond the hills the sky flamed gorgeously, crimson and scarlet and sapphire, yellow and blue. The last rays of the sinking sun touched the clouds with incandescent glory. And then night lay upon the land.

A globelike moon, ruddy and hot, sailed with dignity up toward the zenith—a moon of drought time. It wrapped the desert in a weird, reddish light, like some soft enchantment. Rand came to the border of the tilled

ground—to the barbed-wire fence on one side of which the wilderness rioted, while on the other the alfalfa grew obediently under the care of man.

His cayuse sniffed the air and quickened its pace. Rand was conscious of a delicious smell of moisture, mingled with the perfume of the alfalfa. He turned to look, and saw a broad field glimmering like a still sea in the moonlight—where the water had been let in upon the thirsty acres.

A broad and dusty avenue led him on, it seemed interminably, straight as a Roman road. Rand had no need to alight and ask directions at any one of the houses which he passed from time to time. He had studied the map of Nampa with great care, and his sense of location was rather more than well developed. Moreover, he knew a lemon grove when he saw it; he would know "Rand's ranch" when he came to it.

He passed acre after acre of reclaimed fields, the pony hurrying on impetuously. Huge trees threw fantastic shadows athwart the moonlit road. Rand was half inclined to believe that it was some hallucination of the moonlight which presently made the cayuse halt and snort and then begin to dance fearfully from side to side.

But the animal's ears were tensely forward, and when Rand jerked its head angrily to one side he could see the whites of the frightened, rolling eyeballs.

"Hello!" he said softly. "Something up? Let's see. Here, you devil on springs, be still!"

He sawed on the bit until the cayuse was for a moment quiet, if trembling in every muscle. Rand dismounted at this favorable instant and stepped forward, thrusting his arm through the reins. The cayuse hung back and began to snort again. Rand swore at him comprehensively, and finally settled the matter by arbitration—tied his horse to a near-by tree.

Then, moving forward, he put his foot on something in a deep shadow—something soft and yielding. Disgust stirred within him and he drew back. "Dead horse!" he muttered. But it was worse than that.

A vague moan struck his ear as he was turning away. Now, a dead horse does not moan. Rand whirled about on his heel. "What's that?" he demanded.

There was no answer—not a sound. Yet he was sure that he could distinguish a barely audible fluttering upon the silence, as of breath laboriously drawn.

"Somebody hurt!" Rand exclaimed anxiously. He stepped over the body of the dead animal, and went down on both knees by another body. "Poor devil!" said Rand compassionately.

The blackness was dense. Rand's groping fingers found a face, warm beneath his touch—an oddly smooth cheek, absolutely still. A tangle of long hair enmeshed his fingers, and Rand's heart seemed to leap into his mouth.

"Great heavens!" he cried. "It's—why, it's a woman!"

That was true. He made out that her horse had fallen, catching one foot beneath it to hold her a firm prisoner. She had probably fainted after a long and exhausting struggle to free herself.

A dead horse is no mean weight, but there was no time to lose and nothing at hand which would serve as a lever. Rand discovered that it was no more than a foot which was held down inexorably, and somehow—he could not have said how, later; but strength comes to one wherewith to meet emergencies—somehow he lifted the dead bulk of the thing and simultaneously drew the

woman free. A moment later he had her in his arms and was bearing her out into the moonlight, to put her down on a soft spot by the roadside.

She did not stir, nor utter another sound. Rand stood over her with his arms akimbo and a great wonder surging in his brain; he thought her the most beautiful thing he had ever laid eyes upon.

"Why," he said breathlessly, "she's—she's mighty like a flower!"

But he remembered that there was a duty owing the girl higher than an appreciation of her beauty; and resolutely he took his eyes from her face and considered ways and means. His experience in the reviving of unconscious females was somewhat limited, but he was trying hard to recall the methods employed by novelists to bring back to consciousness their maltreated heroines.

Something drew him back to the horse. He bent over the animal, touching tentatively the still flanks. It was quite lifeless. "Strange!" thought Rand. "Uncommonly strange!" And he fumbled in his pockets for the match which he presently drew along his thigh.

There was a stink of sulphur and a spitting, blue light. Rand shielded it with his cupped hands, though the air was so motionless that when he held the little flame, bending over the body, it flared upward without a flicker.

The light was quite insufficient for a prolonged examination, yet Rand found that which made him put his teeth together firmly, biting on a savage curse. "The filthy hound!" he cried—meaning the man who had done this thing.

A small, round hole was in the horse's head; thick blood welled from it very deliberately. The horse had been shot, either with a revolver or with a rifle of small caliber.

The match burned low and scorched the man's fingers. He dropped it and stood erect, smitten with a great amazement. "It can't have been long since," he mused. "Why didn't I hear the shot? But that girl—what about her?"

A slow, persistent drip-drip of water caught his ear. It seemed to come from the side of the road. Rand followed the sound, and stumbled over the rigid roundness of the great water pipe. The hand that he rested upon it to save himself a fall came away moist and sticky, and when he stooped and felt the surface of the ground thereabouts, he dabbled his fingers in a little pool of water. "This is luck," he observed; and soused his handkerchief in it.

Returning to the girl, he laid the sodden linen on her forehead for a moment, and then very gently moistened the rest of her face.

She sighed deeply, and moved. Her lips, which were full and tempting, parted ever so slightly. The long, upcurling lashes trembled on the wonderful oval of her cheek; and she was looking up at him with a serene, steadfast perplexity that took his breath away. The moonlight that sank into her eyes glowed in their depths like a slow fire that needed but the breath of romance to quicken it to flame.

He heard himself stammering: "You—I beg your pardon—you fainted."

Under his gaze a deep color burned in her cheeks. She sat upright suddenly and her quick, feminine fingers—they were brown, but slender and tapering, he noted—began to arrange the disorder of her hair.

"Thank you," she told him, a bit tremulously. "I must

have—fainted, as you say. My mare fell without warning, and I was caught."

She turned her gaze to his with an impulsive movement of her head. "But how—" she demanded breathlessly. "You must have lifted that mare bodily!"

"It was nothing," he told her gravely. "I'm glad that I came along in time to be of assistance. Permit me."

Seeing that she wished to rise, he offered his hand; she put her fingers for an instant into his broad palm, and was on her feet—but only to utter a little cry of pain, and to cling to his arm, when she had rested her weight upon the bruised foot.

"Oh!" she said. "Oh!"

"Tell me what I can do," Rand begged.

The girl smiled bravely. "I'm afraid I can't walk," she said. "But there—it feels better already. Only the shoe hurts. Have you a knife?"

She sat down by the roadside again, extending a hand for the knife. But Rand, with an "if you don't mind, I'll be very careful," bent upon one knee and began dexterously to slit the leather of the little riding boot. Because of his care and the delicacy of it, it was rather a prolonged operation; the girl set her teeth and bore the slight pain of the unavoidable wrenchings without a murmur. In the end she thanked him with an unfeigned gratitude.

"It feels so, so much better," she assured him. "But what am I to do? I can't walk home."

"I've a pony," Rand assured her. "He's entirely at your service. If you'll wait a moment—"

He hurried back to the dead animal, ungirthed and removed the saddle, and transferred it to the cayuse. Returning, he lifted her very gently into the saddle, and gave her the reins. "There!" he cried triumphantly.

She smiled down upon him in bewildering gratitude. "I don't know how to thank you," she said.

"Don't try to. I'll feel ever so much more comfortable if you won't. You're more easy now?" he added anxiously.

"Entirely."

"You can stand it until we get to my ranch? I'll have a carriage fixed up for you there, and—"

"Your ranch?" she exclaimed. "Why, you're a stranger, sir!"

Rand lifted the saddle he had taken from the cayuse back, and put it over his arm. "I am," he agreed slowly. "Perhaps you can be my guide to my ranch? I'm Rand."

TO BE CONTINUED.

THE VALUE OF WORK.

"I met Thomas A. Edison at the Carlton, in London," said a New Yorker on the Cunard pier. "Edison astonished me with his account of the hard work he has done in his time. Why, the man thinks nothing of working twenty hours a day for weeks on end!"

"After lunch one day Edison and I walked up the Haymarket. Edison, as usual, talked about hard work. I said thoughtfully:

"I suppose success always means hard work, doesn't it?"

"Yes," said Edison, 'it does.'

"He nodded toward a poor old sandwich man—a poor, thin, bent old fellow of seventy or so, staggering along in the gutter under three heavy and enormous sandwich boards—and he added:

"'But failure means harder work.'"

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